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ABSTRACT

This report assesses implementation, knowledge, understanding, and use of the National Record of Achievement (NRA) in all sectors in Scotland in 1995. The report also seeks to identify problem areas and examples of good practice and make recommendations for the future development and promotion of the NRA in Scotland. The NRA is a United Kingdom-wide initiative intended to provide a common format for summarizing an individual's overall achievements in education, training, and throughout life, and to provide a standard presentational style. Questionnaires were sent to all secondary, independent, and special schools and institutions of further and higher education in Scotland. Smaller samples of employers, training providers, careers service personnel, and school leavers were contacted for input. The report includes an executive summary and 13 chapters. Chapters include: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Aims and Methodology"; (3) "Key Points from Initial Information Gathering"; (4) "Survey of Directors of Education"; (5) "Survey of Schools"; (6) "The Views of Young People"; (7) "The Views of Careers Service Staff"; (8) "Survey of Employers and Training Providers"; (9) "Survey of Further and Higher Education Institutions"; (10) "Case-Studies of Schools"; (11) "Good Practices and the NRA"; (12) "Issues Arising from the Findings"; and (13) "Recommendations." Contains 15 references. (EH)

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The National Record of Achievement in Scotland

An Evaluation

Bridget Somekh
Teresa Tinklin
Lynne Edwards
Ron Mackay

SO 028 336

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Bridget Somekh
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The Scottish Council for Research in Education

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAP	Careers service action plan
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DSM	Devolved school management
EA	Education authority
EIL	Education-industry liaison
FE	Further education
HE	Higher education
HMI	HM Inspector of Schools
IAP	Individual action plan
LEC	Local Enterprise Company
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NRA	National Record of Achievement
PCDR	Personal and Career Development Record
PDF	Personal development folder
PDT	Personal development time
PRAISE	Pilot Record of Achievement in Schools Evaluation
PSE	Personal and Social Education
RANSC	Records of Achievement National Steering Committee
RoA	Record of Achievement
SCCC	Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SCRE	The Scottish Council for Research in Education
SHERA	The Scottish Higher Education Record of Achievement
SOEID	Scottish Office Education and Industry Department
SVQ	Scottish vocational qualification
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

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Executive Summary

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) is a UK-wide initiative introduced jointly by the Employment Department and Department for Education and Science, together with the Scottish Office and Welsh Office, in February 1991. It is intended to provide a single common format to summarise an individual's overall achievements in education, training and throughout life, and to provide a standard presentational style.

The Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) was commissioned by the Scottish Office Education Department and the Scottish Office Industry Department (which have since been amalgamated) to evaluate the NRA. The evaluation was carried out throughout 1995 and aimed to assess the take-up, knowledge, understanding and use of the NRA in all sectors; to identify problem areas and examples of good practice and to make recommendations for the future development and promotion of the NRA in Scotland.

Information was gathered from all relevant groups including schools, institutions of further and higher education, employers, training organisations, directors of education, careers officers, recent school leavers and teachers and pupils in schools. It should be noted that questionnaires were sent to all secondary, independent and special schools and institutions of further and higher education in Scotland, whereas smaller samples of employers, training providers, careers service personnel and school leavers were contacted.

Use of the NRA in schools

- 75% of the schools that responded to the survey were using the NRA or an equivalent. (The response rate to the survey of schools was 55%). There were marked differences in the uptake of the NRA amongst different types of schools with 82% of secondary schools, 45% of special schools and 39% of independent schools using the NRA or an equivalent. *School for Skills* (SCRE, 1994) found that 47% of S4 leavers had an NRA or RoA in 1992/1993. Our findings suggest that a far higher proportion would have left school with an NRA in 1995. (chapter 5)

- TVEI had had an impact on the NRA in 89% of the secondary schools and 82% of the special schools that were using the NRA. The majority of schools (70%) said they had received staff development from their education authorities (EAs) and 59% said they had received some kind of technical support for NRA-related activities. (chapter 5)

- Overall 76% of schools agreed that the process of developing skills and concepts was the most important part of the NRA. Only 9% agreed that the document was the most important part. (chapter 5)

- Guidance staff were involved in the NRA process with pupils in 90% of schools and subject teachers were involved in it to varying degrees in 62% of schools. In the majority of schools, NRA-related activities were occurring in personal and social education, work experience and through guidance and careers interviews. (chapter 5)

- In general, pupils were producing the contents of the personal details, qualifications and credits and employment history pages mainly by themselves. The school achievements, personal statement, achievements and experiences and individual action plan pages were most often produced by pupils and staff working together. In the majority of special schools, all pages except the attendance rate page were being produced as a result of one-to-one contact with a member of staff. (chapter 5)

- Over 90% of schools said they were encouraging their pupils to continue to update their NRAs after leaving school and over 90% were telling their pupils how they might use their NRAs in the transition from school to work, training or further study. (chapter 5)

- 72% of the school leavers now in further or higher education who were surveyed had an NRA and a further 15% had done some work towards one at school but not completed the document. (chapter 6)

- Five of the 9 EAs that responded to our questionnaire for directors of education said they were encouraging their schools to use the NRA rather than requiring them to use it. Four said that the schools in their regions were required to either include the NRA explicitly in their school development plans or to have an explicit NRA policy. (chapter 4)

Use of the NRA post-school

Use in selection

- Out of 95 employers and training providers approached, only 45 agreed to be interviewed. The others said they had never used the NRA, had never heard of it or felt it was not appropriate to their needs. (chapter 8)

- Of the 45 employers and training providers interviewed, 14 employers and 12 training providers said they were using the NRA in selection. (chapter 8)

- 24 of the 34 FE institutions and 4 of the 18 HE institutions responding to the questionnaire said they were using the NRA in selection. (The response rate to the survey of FE and HE institutions was 75%). These figures give percentages of 71% (FE) and 22% (HE) which are far higher than the percentages reported in *School for Skills* (SCRE, 1994): 30% (FE) and 6% (HE). (chapter 9)

- Very few employers, training providers or FE/HE institutions were asking young people for their NRAs in the process of selection. Those that said they were using the NRA in selection were mostly using it only when it was presented at interview or sent with application forms unsolicited by young people. (chapters 8, 9)

- One third of the employees/trainees and 56% of the FE/HE students surveyed said they had shown their NRAs at interview(s). Very few had sent them in with application forms. (chapter 6)
- The majority of employers, training providers, FE/HE institutions and young people that had used the NRA in selection said they had found it useful and that it presented a fair or good overall picture of a young person. (chapters 8, 9, 6)
- About half of the employees/trainees (57%) and 45% of the FE/HE students surveyed said they had been given help while at school on how best to use their NRAs when applying for jobs, training places or further study. The majority of S5 pupils questioned said they knew how they might use their NRAs in the future and said they thought they would find them useful. The majority, however, did not know how they would actually use their NRAs to help them to complete an application form. (chapter 6)
- 63% of the employees/trainees and 74% of the FE/HE students surveyed said it was likely that they would use their NRAs in the future when making applications for jobs, training or further study. (chapter 6)

Use in personal development of young people

- Four out of 14 employers and 6 out of 12 training providers said they were using the NRA for employee/trainee development. Almost all (13 employers, 11 training providers) were developing training plans or individual action plans with young recruits but very few were developing these as part of the NRA. (chapter 8)
- 7 of the 52 FE and HE institutions responding to the questionnaire were using the NRA with enrolled students for student development. All of these were FE colleges. Fourteen other institutions claimed to be using an alternative kind of RoA with their students. Six of these and all the institutions using the NRA were doing action planning as part of the NRA/RoA process. (chapter 9)
- About one third of the employees/trainees (37%) and FE/HE students (36%) surveyed said they had been encouraged by their employers, training providers or institutions to continue to update their NRAs. (chapter 6)
- The majority of school leavers surveyed (77% of employees/trainees and 91% of FE/HE students) said they thought they would update their NRAs in the future. (chapter 6)

Liaison between sectors

- Very few schools had liaised with any other users of the NRA in order to promote the NRA to them or to ask for feedback on it. (chapter 5)
- Very few FE and HE institutions had been contacted by schools or had themselves contacted other users of the NRA in order to promote its use or to ask for feedback on it. (chapter 9)
- The careers service staff interviewed said they had marketed the NRA informally to businesses but that they received no funding to do so officially. (chapter 7)

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Views of the NRA

Value, importance, benefits

- Schools mentioned various benefits of the NRA including that the action planning process was beneficial, that the NRA recognised achievements in and outside school and that it raised pupils' self-esteem. (chapter 5)
- The majority of schools agreed that NRA processes had increased pupil self-motivation in the school, enhanced guidance and made pupils more pro-active in their own learning. (chapter 5)
- The majority of schools indicated that they thought that both the NRA process and document were valuable to pupils of all abilities. (chapter 5)
- In the four case-study schools, it was clear that staff exhibited a high level of commitment to the NRA. Staff expressed the view that the process helped pupils to develop self-esteem and learn skills of self-presentation. The product was seen as an important record of a pupil's achievements which rewarded effort and had a public value. In two of the schools, staff believed that the NRA had made a significant impact on practice in teaching and learning and that it had added value to existing initiatives by providing greater coherence. (chapter 10)
- The majority of S5 pupils surveyed said that the NRA process had raised their awareness of the skills they were using in their subjects and that they had found the process of gradually collecting material towards the NRA helpful in building up a thorough picture of themselves. Over half the pupils said that writing about their personal qualities had given them a boost in self-confidence. About half said that the process had helped them to know themselves better. (chapter 6)
- The majority of FE/HE students (63%) surveyed said they had found reviewing and recording their achievements, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and setting themselves targets, done as part of the NRA process at school, helpful in planning for the future, raising their self awareness and addressing their weaknesses. (chapter 6)
- The majority (77%) of FE/HE students surveyed made a positive comment about the appearance of the NRA folder. Similarly, many pupils in the case-study schools seemed to value the NRA document and find it impressive. (chapters 6, 10)
- Many different views of the value and importance of the NRA were expressed by the respondents to our survey of directors of education. These included that the NRA was a useful basis for completing application forms, producing CVs and preparing for interviews and that it encouraged pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and future. (chapter 4)

Problems and obstacles associated with the NRA

- The main obstacle to a full implementation of the NRA with all pupils cited by the majority of schools (72%) was the amount of guidance staff and subject teacher time it required. Staff in the case-study schools also emphasised that the NRA process was very time-consuming for both pupils and staff, and teacher workload was seen as a significant problem. (chapters 5, 10)

- Staff in the case-study schools were very concerned about the lack of awareness of the NRA amongst employers. They believed there was an urgent need to market the NRA. The credibility of the NRA was seen to rest upon its currency with employers and FE/HE. Almost all EAs responding to our questionnaire also said there was a need for national marketing of the NRA to raise its profile amongst employers and other users. This was echoed by careers service personnel who said the currency of the NRA amongst employers and young people was a key issue and that its profile needed to be raised. (chapters 10, 4, 7)

- Staff in the case-study schools expressed concern that pupils have difficulty writing positively about themselves. The pupils themselves said they found writing positively about themselves difficult and embarrassing: it was difficult to know about themselves and it was seen as boasting to make positive statements about oneself. (chapter 10)

- The 7 FE colleges that were using the NRA in student development cited a lack of resources (time and finance) as the main obstacle to a full implementation of the NRA with all students. (chapter 9)

- FE and HE institutions who were not using the NRA or an alternative for student development gave various reasons for this including that they preferred to use another method, that few students had NRAs, that it was not institutional policy or that it was too time-consuming. (chapter 9)

Issues arising from the findings

In schools

- Many schools have a high level of commitment to the NRA - both to the process of pupils' development of their record and to the final product. However, the lack of interest in and awareness of the NRA amongst users outside of schools may affect schools' commitment and undermine the value young people place in the document.

- The NRA is very time-consuming to implement. If schools do not perceive that they have support from policy-makers, including adequate resources, there is a danger that their present commitment to the NRA may decline.

- Some schools have made progress towards integrating the NRA into the curriculum and into the whole school's approach to assessment and recording. However, the NRA still remains largely a guidance-led initiative and subject teachers tend to be relatively uninformed and less committed to its purposes.

- A central purpose of the NRA is to improve individuals' skills in self-presentation. However, both staff and pupils agree that it is difficult for young people to write positively about themselves and focus on their achievements.

Post-school

- There is lack of clarity and considerable differences of opinion amongst different stakeholders about the purpose and value of the NRA post-school.

- Young people seem keen to continue updating their NRAs post-school but few institutions or organisations are encouraging them to do this.
- Is it feasible and/or appropriate for the NRA to continue to be promoted as a record of life-long achievement to be used across all kinds of organisations as both a tool for selection and a means of self-assessment and personal learning?
- Given the current aims for the NRA to be used throughout an individual's life in school, FE/HE and employment, what are the implications for promoting the NRA effectively?
- Currently few mechanisms seem to be in place for effective liaison between the different sectors using the NRA. It might be feasible to integrate the NRA formally with existing services and initiatives, as it is already being integrated informally by some schools, employers and other interested parties.

Recommendations

In the final chapter we present suggestions and recommendations arising from the evaluation which have implications for the continuing implementation of the NRA. We hope this will form a useful discussion document for national policy-makers as well as for those leading the development of the NRA within schools, FE and HE institutions and the new local authorities.

- Government policy on, and support for, the NRA needs to be re-stated in order to give it a high profile nationally.
- The purpose of the NRA should be clarified, so that individuals, educational institutions and employers all share a common understanding of the way the process of compiling the NRA relates to the NRA folder, and the relative importance of each. In particular, a decision needs to be made as to whether it is feasible and/or appropriate for the NRA to continue to be promoted as a record of life-long achievement to be used across all kinds of organisations as both a tool for selection and a means of self-assessment and personal learning.

  If the answer is yes, the NRA needs to be promoted more effectively, particularly to employers and higher education. Appropriate strategies would need to be developed, costed and resourced.
- One body should be given overall responsibility for promoting the NRA and it should be clear whether this body has any powers to enforce.
- There is a need to develop mechanisms to give the NRA a more central role. For example, the NRA could be incorporated as a part-requirement in other initiatives such as Skillseekers, Education-Business partnerships and Investors in People.
- It needs to be made clear *who is responsible for what* in developing and using the NRA; and effective liaison mechanisms need to be developed between all involved. Schools, education authorities, further education, higher education, careers services, trainers, employers, individuals and even parents all have a role to play, but at present the responsibilities of each of these stakeholders and their inter-relationships are unclear.

- It should be recognised that there needs to be diversity in NRA practice if it is to span a wide range of educational and commercial organisations. Schools, FE/HE, trainers and employers need to be able to customise the NRA *process* to suit the needs of individuals *at that time, in that context*. An individual's NRA should be seen as a dynamic document which is both added to and amended over the years. Some consistency of the NRA *product* is important, however, to ensure that it is of use when the individual makes a transition to a different organisation.

- The role of careers services in supporting the NRA process and promoting the product needs to be clarified. The current involvement of the careers services with the NRA in schools should be developed further: there would be obvious benefits in integrating the careers action plan (CAP) with the action planning process in the NRA but this would necessitate increased resources for careers services.

- Young people should be encouraged to see their NRA as a tool-kit and aide-memoire for their own use, as well as a document that might be used in its entirety. They need to be shown how to select relevant information from their NRA for use in both written applications and interviews.

- Serious consideration should be given to how best schools - and indeed other organisations - can resource the process of compiling and producing the NRA. After the demise of TVEI there may be a need for some additional funding. On the other hand, if the NRA is seen to be sufficiently worthwhile, schools may be able to resource it from existing funds. Internal funding, however, involves setting priorities, and resources devoted to one initiative can only be used for another if the two are integrated.

- In schools, the NRA should be integrated with the curriculum; and subject teachers as well as guidance staff should be involved in supporting the NRA process. This implies the need for in-service training in the NRA for all teachers.

- All concerned need to recognise that young people find it embarrassing, and therefore difficult, to write positively about themselves. The NRA is designed to help them develop skills in self-assessment and self-presentation, and to improve their self-image. However, they will continue to need considerable support in this area at least until the NRA process is sufficiently embedded in teaching and learning practice to bring about something of a culture change.

- Ideally, the NRA should become a standard part of practice in assessment and recording in educational institutions.

- Ideally, the NRA should become a standard part of practice in appraisal schemes in employment.

- Institutions need to ensure that the NRA is adopted in such a way that the best possible use is made of resources. To manage the change effectively, the NRA must either build upon on-going work or become part of a broadly based strategy linking it with other new developments.

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1 Introduction

The National Record of Achievement

According to *Using the NRA: a Guide for Schools*, published by SCOTVEC and NCVQ, 'Recording achievement aims to:

- formally recognise and value individuals' learning and achievement
- motivate individuals and encourage their further development
- help individuals to manage their learning and transition
- act as a summary record.

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) provides a national format for summarising achievements in education, training and throughout life. It is developed by the individual and helps to motivate and support them through all stages of learning and decision-making. The NRA encourages a common approach to learning, and helps to recognise a broader range of individual achievements'.

The NRA is a UK-wide initiative introduced jointly by the Employment Department and Department for Education and Science, together with the Scottish Office and Welsh Office, in February 1991. The NRA is intended to provide a single common format to summarise an individual's overall record and to provide a standard presentational style.

There are some obvious advantages to standardisation in terms of comparability between individual records, and ease of use for selection purposes at transition points eg between different phases in the education system, or between education and employment. There may also, however, be disadvantages. The introduction of the NRA was imposed by central government to replace a number of existing records of achievement schemes. It is important to establish whether the NRA serves the interests of Scottish people within a system of education and training - and employment - which is significantly different from that in the rest of the UK.

A brief overview of research and development in profiling and recording achievement

The NRA builds upon a considerable amount of previous development work and research in profiling and records of achievement undertaken in Scotland and the UK as a whole.

In the 1970s, there was growing concern in Scotland at the divisiveness of the examination system which at that time led to a large number of young people being categorised as 'non-certificate' and leaving school without any qualifications. In response, the Headteachers' Association of Scotland set up a working group, in collaboration with the Scottish Council for Research in Education, to explore the feasibility of producing pupil 'profiles' which would summarise the achievements of pupils. This group recommended that assessments should refer to general skills and factors such as perseverance and enterprise as well as specific achievements. It also developed the SCRE

profile assessment system as a common form of school reporting for all pupils, and recommended that 'improved diagnostic profiles' should be developed 'for each subject and activity within the curriculum' (SCRE, 1977).

In 1985, following the publication in 1984 of a DES policy statement on records of achievement, nine pilot schemes were set up in England and Wales to run concurrently with the Pilot Records of Achievement in Schools Evaluation (PRAISE). PRAISE produced an interim report in 1987 and a final report in 1988, and this was used by the Records of Achievement National Steering Committee (RANSC) to produce a report and recommendations (1989), including that: records of achievement should provide a coherent framework for all forms of assessment in the secondary school; the process should involve all students from the first year onwards in self-appraisal; this process should be supported by student-teacher discussions; the RoA process should culminate in a summary document containing a personal statement by the pupil and recording positive skills and achievements; this document should be the property of the student and be used by him or her in approaching future employers.

Meanwhile, considerable work on developing pupils' skills in self-assessment and presentation of evidence of achievement was carried out in both Scotland and the UK as a whole within TVEI. Brown and Black (1988) provide an overview of the development of the RoA philosophy and practice in schools to that date. They raise some critical questions about: the validity of the RoA as a form of summative assessment and its utility for employers; the ethics of requiring individuals to make public personal information about themselves; and the logistics of costs and time. By implication they endorse its value mainly 'where RoA developments are directed towards new learning approaches and teacher-student relationships'. In 1989 the TVEI unit of the Training Agency published draft guidelines on records of achievement in the UK as a whole, and following adaptation, *Guidance for those Managing TVEI (Scotland): Recording Achievement and Planning Individual Development* was published in 1990. This builds upon previous work, in particular PRAISE/RANSC. Emphasis is placed upon the importance of the RoA 'process,' especially: one-to-one consultations with tutors to support student self-appraisal; the collection of evidence to back up statements; and involvement of students and teachers in reviewing and summarising that evidence. The summative RoA is to include a record of experience/statement of achievement in 'general' or 'core skills' in line with the recommendations of the Scottish Consultative Council for the Curriculum (1989).

The publication of the core format of NRA in December 1990 and the formal launch of the NRA in February 1991 were designed to incorporate a simplified version of recording achievement within the assessment pattern of the new National Curriculum in England and Wales. Mary James, a member of the PRAISE research team (1995) suggests that the student-centred philosophy of records of achievement and TVEI were in conflict with the emphasis upon testing levels of student attainment in subject knowledge in the National Curriculum. If this is so, it would be reasonable to suppose that the implementation of the NRA might be substantially different in terms of practice in schools within Scotland where the 5-14 curriculum is non-statutory and approaches the assessment of student attainment differently.

There is some evidence that this may be the case. For example, during 1992-93 Strathclyde Regional Council and Scottish Enterprise funded Madeleine Sharp to carry out an evaluation of The Individual Action Planning Pilot Project (Sharp, 1993). In the

recommendations she states that 'action planning is a feature of NRA and the Skillseekers programme'. This association of the NRA with a continuing process of student-centred learning, in the style of the earlier work reported by PRAISE, is in stark contrast to the evaluation of the NRA carried out by Research International for the Employment Department and the Department for Education. This makes almost no mention of the *process* by which individual learners develop their NRA other than a statement on page 7 of part one that, 'In schools, compilation of the NRA was a two-way process involving the student and tutors'.

Reflecting its terms of reference, Research International's evaluation of the NRA, published in 1993, is in two parts. Part one concentrates upon the take-up of the NRA in schools, post-compulsory institutions and employers and training organisations. It reports that 'over half of the secondary schools in Britain had ordered copies of the NRA by January 1992' . It suggests that the NRA is being used primarily as a summary record of achievement issued to school students in year 11 (S4) or less frequently in year 10 (S3) and to rather fewer than half the students in post compulsory education. Use among employers and training organisations was found to be 'limited'. Part two, which is considerably more substantial, concentrates upon use of the NRA by employers, training organisations and college staff as an aid to selection and recruitment. It concludes that 'young people found the NRA useful both in preparing for and during interviews,' but adds also that 'a significant group of young people did not even think of using it, especially at the application stage'.

The Research International Evaluation was commissioned by the Employment Department and the Department for Education 'to assess firstly the early take-up of the NRA and secondly its use as a selection tool among employers and colleges and by young people when seeking job, college or training places'. These aims are somewhat narrower than those of the present evaluation commissioned by the Scottish Office (see chapter 2). The Scottish Office is in close contact with the DfEE and NCVQ about practice in England and Wales and there is no difference in emphasis of policy in Scotland. However, the wider terms of reference of the present evaluation have enabled us to look in detail at the student-centred process of compiling the NRA in schools, and we have found much evidence that this process is considered by teachers and regional authority personnel in Scotland to be of key importance in developing pupils' skills and abilities.

In 1993 SCRE was commissioned by the TVEI Unit of the Scottish Office Industry Department to carry out a national survey of the development through TVEI of personal and transferable skills (*School for Skills*, SCRE, 1994). In this study the NRA/RoA is identified as one of the 'TVEI-related activities' which 'provide direct links between education and industry'. The *School for Skills* study is of value in providing the present study with some base-line data against which to measure progress in implementation of the NRA over the two-year period 1993-95. In 1993 around 40% of school leavers had an NRA. According to school staff about 50% of pupils were involved 'to a great extent' in the process of 'choosing content' and 'final production' of their NRA, and about 35% in 'holding information' (this lower figure due to schools' sense of responsibility for keeping pupils' NRAs safely). Some employers (40%) and liaison staff in FE (96%) and HE (47%) said they 'had seen an NRA/RoA' but only in FE was there any evidence that students were encouraged to add to their NRA while continuing their education. The researchers commented: 'If the NRA/RoA is to be of value to young people when preparing for or attending interviews with employers, its value will be considerably

diminished unless progress throughout education, training and employment continues to be recorded' (*op cit* p39).

An additional study, commissioned by NCVQ/SCOTVEC, was carried out in 1994 by the David Garforth Agency into 'the recording of achievement and action planning processes for personal and career development, with particular reference to the NRA'. This focused on FE, HE, training and employment 'where development of action planning and recording of achievement has been slower than in schools'. It concludes: 'Although there are examples of excellent practice, the general pattern is of limited use of action planning and records of achievement to support individuals. This is despite active developmental work at national and local level in each sector, and policy encouragement from Government' (*op cit* p2).

2 Aims and Methodology

Aims

SCRE was commissioned by the then Education and Industry departments of the Scottish Office (now amalgamated) to:

- assess take-up, knowledge, understanding and use of the NRA in all sectors
- identify problem areas, including resource requirements, and make recommendations on how these can be overcome
- identify examples of good practice in the use of the NRA
- make recommendations for the future development and promotion of the NRA in Scotland.

Methodology

Information for the evaluation was gathered from all relevant sectors including education, employment and training. Information was gathered in three ways:

- an initial phase of unstructured information gathering from appropriate authorities
- structured surveys of schools, institutions of further and higher education, directors of education, employers, training organisations and recent school leavers
- informal telephone interviews with a small number of careers officers
- case-studies of four schools.

Initial phase of information gathering

During the preliminary stage of the research, formal and informal interviews (some by telephone) were carried out with a number of individuals who had been closely involved with the development of the NRA in Scotland. These included HMI, TVEI personnel, representatives of HE, CBI, SOED and Scottish Enterprise and officers from education authorities. The aim of this phase of the research was to identify the main issues surrounding the NRA. The information gathered provided useful contextual information and informed the questions that were asked at later stages of the evaluation.

Surveys

Most of the information gathered for the evaluation was gathered through structured surveys. Table 2.1 shows the groups that were surveyed and the methods used.

Directors of education

A short questionnaire was sent to all directors of education in Scotland in order to gather information about the approaches being adopted to the implementation and development of the NRA by different education authorities.

Schools

In order to determine the uptake, use and understanding of the NRA in the secondary education sector, questionnaires were sent to all secondary, independent and special schools with secondary age pupils in Scotland. Respondents were also asked for their views of the problems and benefits associated with the NRA. It was decided to contact all schools rather than a sample in order to gain as broad a picture as possible of the uptake of the NRA in this sector. Also the relatively small number of schools in Scotland (672) and the relatively low costs of postal questionnaires made this a manageable undertaking.

Table 2.1: Survey methods used

	Method used	*Sample contacted*
Directors of education	Questionnaire	All
Schools	Questionnaire	All secondary, independent and special schools
Recent school leavers	Questionnaire	50 in employment or training 100 in further or higher education
Institutions of further and higher education	Questionnaire	All
Careers officers	Telephone interview	8
Employers and training organisations	Telephone interview	95

Recent school leavers

It was important to seek the views of young people who had recently left school as they might have experience of using their NRAs in the transition from school to work, training or further study and could comment on the NRA process that they had experienced at school. A total of 150 school leavers were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire: 50 who had recently started employment or training and 100 who had recently started courses at institutions of further or higher education.

Institutions of further and higher education

In order to determine how widely the NRA was being used by institutions of further and higher education in selection and in student development, questionnaires were sent to all institutions in this sector in Scotland. Again, it was decided to contact all institutions rather than a sample in order to gain as broad a picture as possible and because the total number was only 69.

Careers officers

The views of a small sample (8) of careers officers were gathered using informal telephone interviews. This was to gain an insight into the links between the careers service action plan (CAP) and the action plan done as part of the NRA.

Employers and training organisations

Employers and training organisations that recruit school leavers were surveyed using a structured telephone interview. This approach was adopted because experience has shown that this method produces a far higher response rate in this sector than a postal questionnaire. A total of 95 organisations were contacted and asked if they would participate in a telephone interview. The aim of the interview was to find out how widely the NRA was being used by employers and training organisations in recruitment and in employee development.

Case-studies

It was decided to supplement the quantitative data gathered about schools through the survey with more in-depth studies of four secondary schools. Each school was visited, members of staff and pupils were interviewed and relevant documentation was collected. The aim of the case-studies was to produce a detailed description of NRA-related practices in the schools, to determine the problems that schools had encountered in implementing and developing the NRA and to seek the staff's views of the NRA. The case-studies also provided an opportunity to interview pupils in different year groups, to find out their views and understanding of the NRA.

The case-study data are extremely useful in raising points which do not appear in the survey data. Surveys, by their very nature, place most credence on what the majority thinks, whereas case-studies enable the views of individuals and minority groups to be included in the analysis of issues. Since some individuals are considerably better informed than others it is important to take account of their views, particularly when exploring difficult issues.

Case-study data are primarily collected through interviews in which some relationship of trust is established between the researcher and the interviewee(s). Surveys, on the other hand, collect information in a much more impersonal way, the only link between the researcher and the informant being established through introductory comments on the questionnaire or in a covering letter. It is inevitable, therefore, that in a survey informants provide information which is more clear-cut (especially if the questions are of the tick-box variety) and generally much briefer, often without signalling any uncertainties or 'mixed feelings'. In an interview, on the other hand, they are prepared to probe problems and difficulties if they feel a sense of rapport with the interviewer.

As a result of this difference in the nature and provenance of the data there are some differences in emphasis between the two accounts of NRA practice in schools contained in chapters 5 and 10 of this report. This is an important part of the research design; the two accounts have been compared and contrasted in order to reach a deeper understanding of issues and a better basis for putting forward recommendations.

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3 Key Points from Initial Information Gathering

During the preliminary stage of the research, formal and informal interviews (some by telephone) were carried out with a number of individuals who had been closely involved with the development of the NRA in Scotland. These included HMI, TVEI personnel, representatives of HE, CBI, SOED and Scottish Enterprise and officers from education authorities. They gave their perceptions of the current state of progress, the problems that had been overcome and the challenges still to be faced. They also provided the research team with a number of useful documents.

This preliminary work, carried out during the first three months of 1995, identified the following key points and themes for further investigation.

The NRA is an initiative of central government

The NRA was introduced by government in an attempt to give coherence to previous Records of Achievement (RoA) initiatives throughout the UK. In Scotland a number of regions had already developed RoA pilot schemes, in some cases under the auspices of TVEI. The imposition of the NRA, therefore, might have been expected to create tensions in a relatively satisfactory situation. In fact, it appears to have been readily accepted. The previous RoA initiative provided schools with a spring-board from which to launch the NRA.

RoA pilot activities within Scotland were very varied. In different regions, even between different schools, they exhibited different characteristics, eg some devoted more resources to computer-supported development of the RoA, others to individual action planning, others to integrating the RoA with existing patterns of assessment and reporting. Those of our interviewees with a national perspective felt that the major challenge has, therefore, been to achieve consistency from a starting point of diversity. Education authorities have made obvious efforts to acknowledge and introduce the NRA. Where they have produced strategic plans additional costs have been a cause of concern (ie staff time, secretarial support, IT support, training, co-ordination management). However, many of these documents and preliminary interviews indicated that the NRA is being 'accommodated' into the existing work on the RoA. That is, rather than the NRA replacing what was in place before, it is taking on features of the previous RoA, involving no major changes of direction.

Responsibility for promoting the NRA is shared by many groups

Many groups share responsibility for co-ordinating and/or promoting the NRA. The National Record of Achievement Working Group set up by the Scottish Office Education Department has representation from many interested groups and plays an important

coordinating role. Other groups continue to play a major part in developing and promoting the NRA, including TVEI, the education authorities, Scottish Enterprise, and the Education and Training Committee of the CBI Scotland.

From interviews conducted in the first three months of 1995 it emerged that the lines of responsibility and relationships between these bodies are either not clear or not perceived to be clear by many of those involved.

In July 1995 the SOED appointed a National Development Officer for the NRA who is employed by SCOTVEC and works closely with the NRA Working Group. This appointment came after data collection for the evaluation had been completed, but our preliminary study alone suggests that it is likely to go some way to filling an important need.

■ NRA has many stakeholders

The NCVQ/SCOTVEC Guides for the use of NRA identify the following stakeholders:

Individuals — the owners of the individual NRA. In schools, they are 'pupils'; during training they are 'trainees'; in FE/HE they are 'students'; in employment, they are 'employees'. The NRA must serve the individual's needs at each critical transition point. In secondary schools this means catering for different kinds of transition need: eg for a school leaver at the statutory school leaving age of 16 with virtually no formal qualifications; or a leaver with Standard Grade and SCOTVEC qualifications making the transition to training or employment; or an eighteen-year-old leaver with Standard and Higher Grade qualifications making the transition to employment, FE or HE. These are only examples as, in practice, individuals' needs differ widely.

Teachers/Trainers — the individuals responsible for education and training. The guides are not explicit as to whether 'teachers' includes university teachers. The greatest responsibility for undertaking the NRA appears to fall on schools. Nevertheless, if the NRA is to be a life-long endeavour and record, it must be taken up by the new institution after every transition.

Employers/Supervisors/Managers — clearly those to whom 'employees' report or are ultimately responsible.

Parents (the guides mention *friends and families*) — those who can assist the individual with his or her individual action plan.

Careers services personnel — there is an area of common interest between careers officers and teachers promoting the NRA, particularly in relation to action planning. However, the interviews clarified that the approach of careers officers is somewhat different, with an emphasis on their own responsibility for giving advice and drawing up an action plan on behalf of the young person who signs it after discussion and agreement. The situation is somewhat complicated because currently the careers service in Scotland is in the process of changing from a publicly provided service to a service provided by companies under contract to government. In most cases this is taking place through setting up a joint enterprise of the existing regional careers service and the LEC.

Others — there are many other initiatives in schools (primary, secondary and special), involving a large number of individuals, which have some overlap of purposes with the NRA. These include the 5-14 curriculum, Skillseekers, education-business partnerships and the consultation process leading to the reform of the 16-19 curriculum (Higher Still). Although there is the potential for the NRA to act as a catalysing agent for all of these - and vice versa - the picture that emerged from our interviews was one of confusion of purposes.

■ Roles and responsibilities for the NRA are not clearly defined among stakeholders

The booklet, *Guidance for Those Managing TVEI (Scotland): Recording Achievement and Planning Individual Development,* supplied by the Employment Department gives the impression that responsibility for initiating the NRA is broadly spread across the school, training provider, FE/HE and employer sectors. It is clear, however, that at present - at least in Scotland - the bulk of the responsibility for the NRA falls onto the schools.

It is intended that the 'Individual' owns his or her NRA but other players may feel responsibility for its protection. For example, schools are concerned that the pupil leaves with a smartly-produced product and one way of ensuring this is to give pupils their completed NRA folders upon leaving. Some of our interviewees felt that this late receipt of the NRA folder could have implications in the extent to which individuals develop a feeling of 'ownership' over their NRA.

The NRA folder is distributed free to all schools according to the number of pupils in S4. It is also distributed to trainers who are involved in Skillseekers. If trainers involved in Skillseekers find a trainee without an NRA, is it incumbent upon them to 'open' an NRA for the trainee? It emerged from the interviews that the exact nature of the obligation, and who has the power to require a stakeholder to take action is unclear.

The SCOTVEC/NCVQ booklet, *Using the NRA: a Guide for Employers* is not seen to constitute a *requirement* for compliance, so considerable variation is likely between the practice of individual trainers and employers. A draft document produced by SCOTVEC for the SOED NRA Group in October 1994 on *Quality Assurance and the NRA* includes an appendix entitled Records of Achievement in Schools — Quality Criteria. These criteria cover policy, process and practice, and draw the attention of users' to 'recommended practices' and ways in which they can be audited by the school itself, by HMI, or by an outside agency. While these documents provide guidance as to quality practices, there is no clear instruction to identifiable parties directing them to adopt, maintain, and monitor some or all of these practices. The potential for engaging committed participation is therefore diminished.

■ The NRA is a partially implemented innovation

Innovations take time to implement (see eg Hall, Loucks, Rutherford and Newlove, 1975). Evaluations which are conducted after sufficient time has elapsed for full implementation have little opportunity to influence development. Evaluations like the present one, which are conducted when there has been time for only partial implementation, have a primary purpose to inform continuing development and improvement.

During the whole of the period of this study, but particularly during the stage of preliminary information gathering, it was clear that our informants have a wide range of

experience of the NRA. Some education authorities had longer traditions than others of pilot work with RoAs, often as a result of the phased introduction of funding from TVEI; some schools had been more deeply involved than others in action planning within TVEI; schools as a whole were at the sharp end of the innovation and were necessarily much more advanced in NRA practice than FE/HE or employers.

Differences between different stakeholders, and even between school and school, are therefore a feature of the stage of the innovation. They may also be indicators of expertise and commitment but this kind of conclusion can only be drawn with great caution. It is very important that the evaluation highlights differences and enables all concerned to learn from each others' experience.

■ Stakeholders value the NRA pages differently

The loose leaf sheets included in the NRA may be presented in any order. They are (in alphabetical order):

- achievements and experiences
- attendance rate
- employment history
- individual action plan
- personal details
- personal statement
- qualifications and credits
- school achievements (now called achievements in education)
- a blank page.

With such a variety of sheets to be completed, coordination of responsibility for collecting and discussing the information which will eventually be summarised for each, is a complex affair.

Moreover, as a *product*, the interest in each of these sheets is likely to vary from constituency to constituency. This means that at each transition point the NRA is 'read' by someone whose priorities may be different from those who advised the individual on its compilation. It also means that advice to individuals on compiling their NRA will vary considerably according to their institutional location.

The 'Individual' therefore must take the initiative in selecting from the various NRA sheets and presenting him or herself appropriately at the point of transition.

■ NRA outcomes are not clearly defined or commonly understood

All stakeholders appear to agree that the process involved in producing the NRA is intrinsically valuable and that the product itself has instrumental value as a source of self-presentation at critical periods or transitions in the lives of young people.

The NRA, however, carries an implicit promise of tangible benefits to the individual. That is, if young people master a complex process of self-evaluation and reflection integrated with the use of knowledge and learning from the curriculum and from the employment market, and generate a source document (NRA) with the help of which self can be presented and marketed, a beneficial outcome will accrue to them. However, from

our interviews it emerged that the exact nature of this beneficial outcome has never been defined. Is it merely the *right* to compete in an ever-diminishing job market? Is it simply the likelihood of increased self-esteem regardless of whether employment is secured? Or it is something more tangible than that?

The cynical have pointed out that the NRA might be used to lay the blame for individual failure on the individual. The optimistic see the NRA as a way of ensuring that the UK builds a strong, flexible, suitably qualified and mobile workforce for the future.

The 'philosophy' underlying Government's interest in the NRA needs to be made more explicit.

The NRA is intended to change practice

The SCOTVEC/NCVQ Guides make it clear that the NRA is intended to have a profound influence on all aspects of schooling — the curriculum, individual subjects, pupil-teacher relations, and relations with training providers, FE, HE and employers.

Intrinsic to NRA is the process as well as the product. From our interviews it was clear that if the guidelines for implementation are followed, there are substantial time implications for both pupils and teachers (and later for trainers and trainees; students and university lecturers; employees and employers). First, time must be devoted by pupils, teachers, secretaries and others to produce each individual NRA and, second, time required to implement the innovation and integrate it into the work of the whole school.

It is important that problems in the implementation of the NRA should be understood in relation to its ambitious aims and the challenges it poses for schools, education authorities, FE/HE and employers. Time and money devoted to NRA means time and money taken from somewhere else, work diverted from other tasks. This point was raised in interviews by almost all of our key informants. It may be that additional resources will be necessary in order to assist those who are having difficulty with NRA.

The NRA is one initiative among many

The NRA is being introduced along with many other initiatives and structural changes in the educational system as a whole. Some of these changes may influence, even determine, how the NRA can be implemented.

For example, there are numerous demands for the attention of education authorities and headteachers. Schools are not *required* to address all of these demands and can prioritise them according to their circumstances, but there is pressure on schools to address the priorities of SOED, including the NRA. There is good will on the part of education authorities and schools to implement the NRA as a pilot project, but there are concerns about its long-term development.

It was clear from our interviews that education authorities and schools are finding the points of contact and overlap between the NRA and other initiatives they were already undertaking, and are making the most of exploiting these links. In this way, the NRA is not seen as a separate initiative, but one which fits in well with existing activities and is mutually supportive of some new activities. These linkages, or points of mutual enhancement, may not always be made explicit. However, the free distribution of the NRA folder to schools for all pupils in S4, and the expectation that (eventually) every young person will have one, is establishing the NRA as a focal point and catalyst for many of the initiatives which have some common purpose with it.

The restructured careers services will make their time available to schools under a service level agreement. They must be very precise about what services they will provide to the schools and exactly how they will contribute to NRA. These new careers services are required to record their 'measurable activity' as evidence of having met their obligations to a school under the terms of the service level agreement. One of the measurable activities is the careers action plan (CAP) — a document written by the careers officer, not by the student. The careers service is willing to encourage the pupil to develop a personal CAP which will be part of the individual's NRA, but they are circumscribing their participation in NRA to something discrete and directly related to one of their own performance measures.

The NRA is implemented by individuals, not by institutions

Michael Quinn Patton, in his book *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* identifies what he calls the 'personality principle'. Successful innovations are the responsibility of a clearly identified individual who is committed to using the results rather than a vaguely-defined institution. In our enquiries, interviewees repeatedly told us the names of committed *individuals* who were undertaking some aspect of the NRA.

There appear to be groups of individuals who are more likely than others to devote energy to implementing the NRA, eg guidance staff and those responsible for Personal and Social Education (PSE). From our interviews it seems that the NRA is taking root with these groups quite strongly because the link is obvious. But it is also clear that schools are aware that to be effective, the NRA must involve all of the teachers and all of the subjects.

There is no clear pattern for the first steps towards adopting the NRA within education authorities and schools. Sometimes the EA has produced a strategy document first. Usually there are TVEI practices already in place. Often, it appears that there has been an informal democratic process — almost a 'Who would like to start by doing what?' approach. Despite the imperative for the NRA product to achieve some consistency nationally, it is likely to evolve in different ways in different schools and regions, reflecting their different starting points.

Functional equivalents of the NRA are being developed within higher education

A consortium of west of Scotland universities is developing SHERA — the Scottish Higher Education Record of Achievement. SHERA mirrors many of the processes described in the SCOTVEC/NCVQ Guides, and a representative of the SHERA team is on the NRA Working Group set up by the SOED. However, the SHERA documentation does not link it explicitly to the NRA.

Edinburgh University, has provided us with a copy of a Personal and Career Development Record (PCDR). This, too, is in many ways similar to the NRA but makes no mention of it. The PCDR was developed with the assistance of Enterprise in Higher Education money.

Both SHERA and PCDR are seen by our informants not as continuations of the NRA but as separate initiatives to meet the needs of higher education. Both SHERA and PCDR carry the copyright of the universities concerned.

This appears to be in some conflict with the intention underlying the NRA. The SCOTVEC Guides make it clear that NRA is intended to serve 'Individuals' rather than the institutions in which they temporarily find themselves. By creating separate records

of achievement, HE is diverting attention from the NRA as a continuing activity/process/product that 'individuals' carry with them throughout their lives, and focusing on temporary needs generated during one phase of their lives only. As a result, individuals may get the impression that the NRA is not a life-long record, but is constrained by the phase and institution in which one finds oneself.

Perhaps this indicates a confusion at policy level, or a misunderstanding in the minds of those who drew up the SCOTVEC/NCVQ Guides, since public money (via the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative of the Employment Department) appears to be being used to undermine a policy - the NRA - also funded by public money (again via the Employment Department).

4 Survey of Directors of Education

In order to contextualise the information gathered from schools on their use of the NRA, it was important to find out about the different approaches being adopted by regional education authorities to the implementation and development of the NRA. For this reason all directors of education in Scotland were contacted and asked to complete a short questionnaire giving information on the approach adopted by their education authority to the NRA and giving their views of the value of the NRA and the problems associated with its implementation.

The sample

A short questionnaire was sent to each of the 12 directors of education in Scotland in April 1995. The questionnaire asked about the use of an RoA in the region before the launch of the NRA in February 1991, about the approach adopted by the education authority (EA) to planning the implementation and development of the NRA, about any obstacles or problems associated with implementing the NRA and about their views of the value of the NRA.

Information was given by nine of the 12 EAs: eight completed the questionnaire and one sent the information in the form of a letter. All information was sent by a member of EA staff other than the director of education. Several supplemented the information requested on the questionnaire with further documentation.

Use of an RoA before the launch of the NRA

Six of the 9 EAs that responded to the questionnaire indicated that schools in their region had been using another kind of RoA before the launch of the NRA in February 1991. All six (plus one that had not been using an RoA previously) said that the NRA was an improvement on the RoA that had previously been in use. Most gave the reason that it was important to have a national standard.

Approaches to implementing and developing the NRA

Seven of the 9 EAs said they had policies or plans regarding the introduction, development or further development of the NRA in their regions. In 5 regions, EAs were encouraging their secondary schools to use the NRA rather than requiring them to use it. In the other 4 regions, schools were required to either include the NRA explicitly in their school development plans or to have an explicit NRA policy.

Although this was not directly asked about on the questionnaire, it was clear that four EAs had carried out NRA pilot schemes in schools in their regions.

Respondents were asked to detail what kinds of support their EAs were providing to schools in their regions to assist them with the implementation or development of the

NRA. Two of the regions were not providing specific support for the NRA at this time, although one of them had provided support in the past. The other 7 EAs were providing support and Table 4.1 details the answers given to this question. Six EAs were providing in-service training and four were providing hardware, software or technical support to their schools. Four were giving schools a staffing allowance or extra teacher time and three had development officers or advisers providing support.

Table 4.1: Support provided by EAs to schools in their regions

	*No of EAs providing this**
In-service	6
Hardware/software/technical support	4
Teacher time/staffing allowance	4
Development officer/Adviser	3
Network/exchange of good practice/support group	3
Supply cover	1
Regional working group	1
No specific support	2

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support.

Respondents were asked what kind of support their EAs had received from the government or government agencies to assist in the implementation or development of the NRA. Only one region said they had received nothing except for the folders and inserts. Five EAs reported that they had received support through TVEI. Others reported receiving support through other initiatives such as Skillseekers or Compact.

■ Problems associated with implementing the NRA

Respondents were asked what they saw as the obstacles to and the problems associated with a full implementation of the NRA. Almost all respondents (8) mentioned that there is a need for national marketing to raise the profile of the NRA amongst employers and other users. Six respondents mentioned the amount of time required in schools to implement the NRA. Many other problems were mentioned and these are detailed in Table 4.2.

■ Views of the value of NRA

Finally, respondents were asked in what ways they saw the NRA as valuable or important. Four of the 9 respondents said that the NRA provides a useful basis for completing application forms, producing CVs or preparing for interviews. Three mentioned that it encourages young people to take responsibility for their learning or for their future. Two said that the process of review, recording and target setting is valuable. Others said that it promotes self-knowledge and that the NRA document provides a full picture of a young person. Many other responses were given and these are detailed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.2: Problems and obstacles associated with a full implementation of the NRA

	*No of EAs mentioning this**
There is a need for national marketing to give the NRA a higher profile amongst employers, colleges, parents etc	8
Time	6
Subject teachers need to be more involved	3
Demise of TVEI	3
Better articulation with the CAP required	3
Resources	2
Lack of clear national guidelines	2
Not well articulated with other developments (eg Skillseekers)	2
Access to computer facilities	2
Demands on staff (especially guidance staff)	2
Staff development required	2
Staffing support required	1
More opportunities post-school should be provided for continued updating	1
Disparity between emphases in different regions gives impression it's not nationally important	1
Difficulty of integrating with teaching, learning, assessment and reporting	1
Page formats make production of the NRA problematic	1
Danger of overloading Personal and Social Education programme	1
Other	9

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one problem.

Table 4.3: Views of the value and importance of the NRA

	*No of EAs mentioning this**
Useful basis for completing application forms, producing CVs, preparing for interviews	4
Encourages pupils to take responsibility for learning, future	3
Valuable process (review, recording, target setting)	2
Promotes self-knowledge	2
Provides a fuller picture of a young person	2
Recognises achievements	1
Raises self-esteem	1
Promotes self-evaluation	1
Increases motivation	1
Encourages lifelong learning	1
Supports personal development	1
Can improve teaching and learning through process of review and target setting	1
Helps young person plan for future	1
Provides baseline for future development	1
Improves the partnership between teachers and learners	1
Young people are proud of it	1
If managed well, it coordinates disparate activities in school	1

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one benefit.

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Summary

- Six of the 9 EAs that responded to the questionnaire were using an RoA before the launch of the NRA. All said they thought the NRA was an improvement on the RoA they had used previously, mainly because they preferred to have a national standard.
- Seven of the EAs said they had policies or plans regarding the introduction, development or further development of the NRA in their regions.
- In 5 regions, EAs were encouraging their secondary schools to use the NRA rather than requiring them to use it. In the other 4 regions, schools were required to either include the NRA explicitly in their school development plans or to have an explicit NRA policy.
- Two of the EAs reported that they were not providing specific support to the schools in their region for the NRA, the other 7 said they were. The kinds of support being provided were: in-service, technical support, staffing allowances and development officers.
- Five of the EAs reported that they had received support for NRA through TVEI. Others reported receiving support through other initiatives.
- Almost all respondents said there was a need for national marketing of the NRA to raise its profile amongst employers and other users.
- Many different views of the value and importance of the NRA were expressed.

5 Survey of Schools

It was recognised that, at present, by far the greatest use in terms of compiling the NRA is in schools. It was essential, therefore, to ascertain the extent of use of the NRA in secondary education and to gain some insight into the actual practices that schools were using to help pupils produce their NRAs.

A questionnaire was sent to the headteacher in every school with pupils of secondary school age in Scotland asking whether the NRA was being used in the school at present. Those schools that were using the NRA were asked a series of more detailed questions about their NRA-related practices, about the management of the NRA in the school and about any liaison the school had had with other users of the NRA. In addition, respondents were asked for their views of the problems and benefits associated with the NRA.

As mentioned in chapter 2, four detailed case-studies of schools were also carried out to supplement the data gathered during this survey. The case-studies are reported in chapter 10.

The sample

Questionnaires were sent to all education authority secondary schools (referred to as secondary schools in the rest of the report), all independent secondary schools, all establishments for pupils with special learning needs which had children of secondary school age and all former list D schools in Scotland. A total of 672 questionnaires were sent out in June 1995 and 369 usable questionnaires were returned. Table 5.1 shows the proportion of questionnaires returned by each different type of school.

Table 5.1: Responses to the questionnaire

	No of questionnaires sent	*No of completed questionnaires returned*	*Percentage*
Secondary schools	405	270	67%
Independent schools	46	23	50%
Special and former list D	221	75**	34%
Totals	672	369*	55%

* One did not specify what type of school it was.
** Independent special schools have been categorised as special and former list D.

The questionnaire was addressed to the headteacher in each school, but in some cases it had been passed on to another member of staff for completion. Table 5.2 shows that, in most schools, the questionnaire had been filled in by a member of the management team.

Table 5.2: Member of staff completing the questionnaire (Total = 369)

	Percentage of questionnaires filled in by this member of staff
Assistant/Depute headteacher	43
Principal/Headteacher	24
Member of the guidance staff	20
Teacher	7
Other	6

Use of the NRA

Schools were asked whether they were using the NRA or an equivalent (ie a record with the same contents as the NRA but a different - usually a regional - format). The definition of 'use' was left to schools to decide. Some will have assumed a minimalist definition ie that issue of the NRA folder to pupils constitutes use. However, it is possible that others who have issued the folder do not feel they can claim that this alone constitutes use. The majority of schools overall (75%) indicated that they were using the NRA or an equivalent. Over half the schools (57%) were using the NRA, a further 18% were using an equivalent to the NRA and 9% were using another kind of RoA. The remaining 16% of the sample were not using either the NRA or an RoA at all with their pupils. The findings from the research carried out for *School for Skills* (SCRE, 1994) suggest that the number of secondary schools using the NRA has increased since 1992/1993. The *School for Skills* research found that 47% of S4 leavers had an NRA or RoA in 1992/1993, while our findings suggest that a far higher proportion of S4 students would have left school with an NRA in 1995. It should be noted, however, that fewer schools (total=57) were surveyed for *School for Skills* than were surveyed for this research.

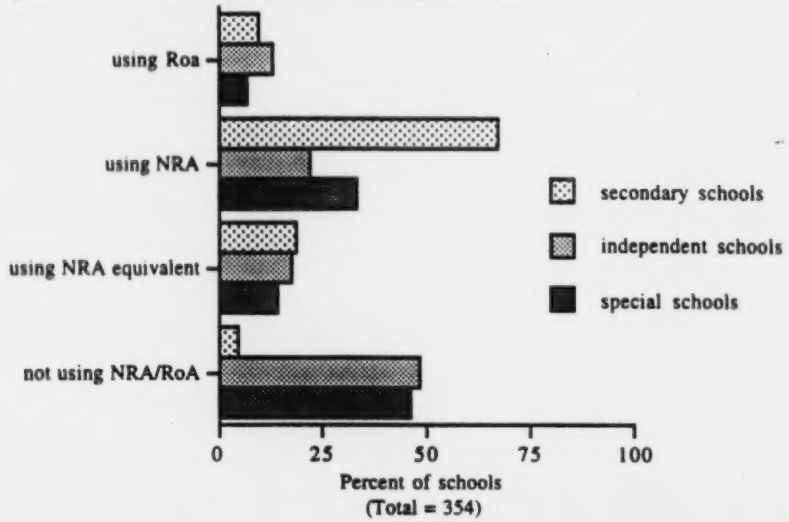
Those schools that were not using the NRA or that were using an RoA were asked whether they had definite plans to introduce the NRA in the future and just under one-third (29%) of them responded that they did.

Figure 5.1 shows that there were marked differences in the uptake of the NRA amongst the different types of school. Generally more secondary schools were using the NRA than independent or special schools, however, some schools in all sectors were using the NRA. Eighty-two percent of secondary schools were using the NRA, but uptake varied from region to region. In all 12 education authority regions, 50% or more of the schools were using the NRA or an equivalent. In 4 of these regions the percentage was over 80%. Uptake of the NRA amongst independent schools was somewhat lower, with 39% using the NRA or an equivalent. This might reflect the fact that, at the time of writing, no encouragement had been given to independent schools to use the NRA. Almost half (45%) of the special schools that responded to the questionnaire were using the NRA or an equivalent.

Those schools that were using the NRA or an equivalent (total = 264) were asked whether they thought the NRA was an improvement on any RoA that they had used previously. Just over half of them (53%) indicated that they had been using an RoA before they started using the NRA. Most of these (85%) said they thought the NRA was an improvement on the RoA they had used previously.

Those that were using the NRA or an equivalent were asked a series of more detailed questions about their use of it. The rest of the chapter will refer only to these 264 schools

Figure 5.1: Percentage of schools using the NRA



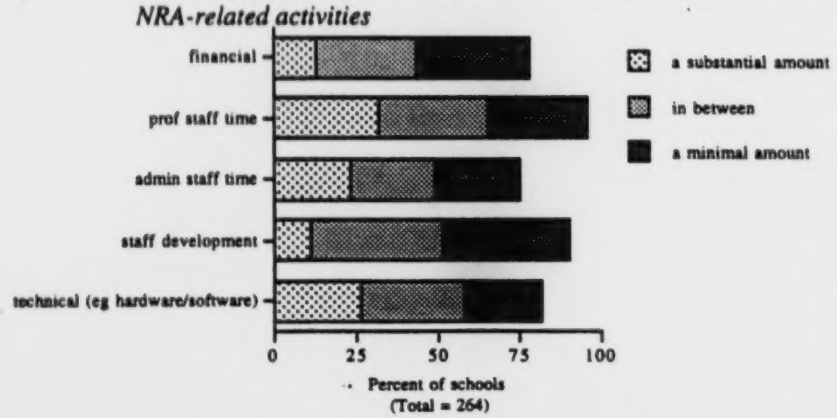
(221 secondary schools, 9 independent schools and 34 special schools). Also the term 'NRA' will be used in the rest of the chapter to refer to the NRA and to any equivalents that were being used. In the questionnaire, 'NRA equivalents' were defined as records with the same contents as the NRA but a different format. Where a school has indicated that they are using an NRA equivalent we assume that this means they are using a regionally designed format for the NRA.

Management of the NRA

The schools that were using the NRA were asked about the management and resourcing of the NRA in the school. Of the 264 schools that were using the NRA, only just over one third (39%) had a written policy regarding the NRA. Almost all of them (96%), however, had a member of staff who had responsibility for coordinating NRA-related activities in the school. In almost half of these schools (47%), the NRA coordinator was the assistant or depute headteacher.

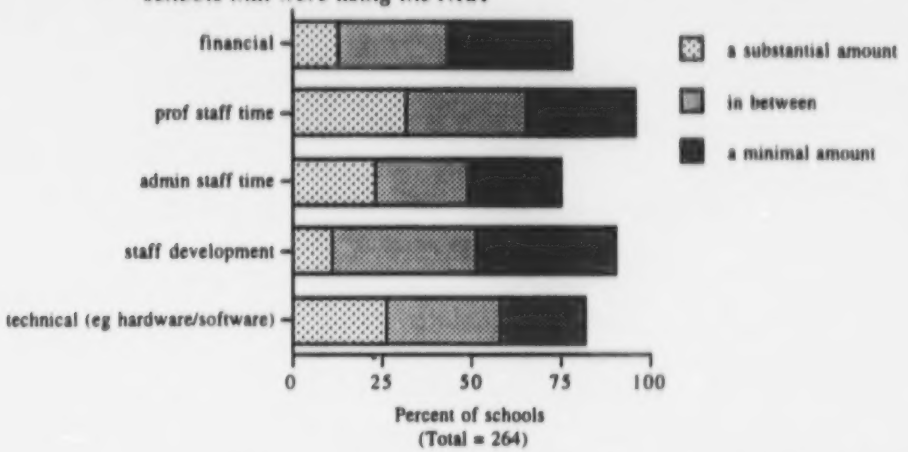
The majority of schools had allocated at least a minimal amount of support to NRA-related activities. Figure 5.2 shows that 75% or more of schools had allocated at least a

Figure 5.2: Amount of support allocated by schools that were using the NRA to NRA-related activities



minimal amount of finance, staff time, staff development and technical support to the NRA. Figure 5.3 shows the amount of support received by schools from their education authorities for the NRA. About half of the school (51%) had received no financial help, almost as many (47%) had received no professional staff time and two-thirds (67%) had received no administrative staff time. The majority of schools (70%), however, had received staff development and over half (59%) had received technical support. Special schools were more likely than secondary schools to say that they had received no support from their education authorities. None of the independent schools had received support from education authorities.

Figure 5.3: Amount of support received for the NRA from education authorities by schools that were using the NRA



The schools were asked whether TVEI had had any impact on their use of the NRA. The large majority (89%) of secondary schools and of special schools (82%) said that it had. Not surprisingly, no independent schools indicated that TVEI had had an impact on their use of the NRA. Schools were asked what they saw as the implications or consequences for NRA of the end of TVEI. Various different answers were given to this and Table 5.3 shows the most popular answers given. The response given by the largest proportion of schools (26%) was that the NRA would continue or that there would be little or no impact.

Table 5.3: The implications or consequences for NRA of the end of TVEI (Total=225)

	Percentage of schools mentioning this
NRA will continue/minimal impact	26
Loss of staff development	20
Loss of finance	16
Loss of admin/secretarial staff support	12
Loss of technical support/hardware/software	11
Loss of staff cover	9
Loss of externally developed materials	5
Loss of dissemination of ideas	5
NRA may/will stop	4

Only 4% expressed concern that the NR might actually stop as a consequence of the loss of TVEI. Many respondents indicated that theu would lose or experience a reduction in some kind of support such as staff sevelopment, finance or secretarial help and that these would now have to be funded by the schools themselves.

NRA practices

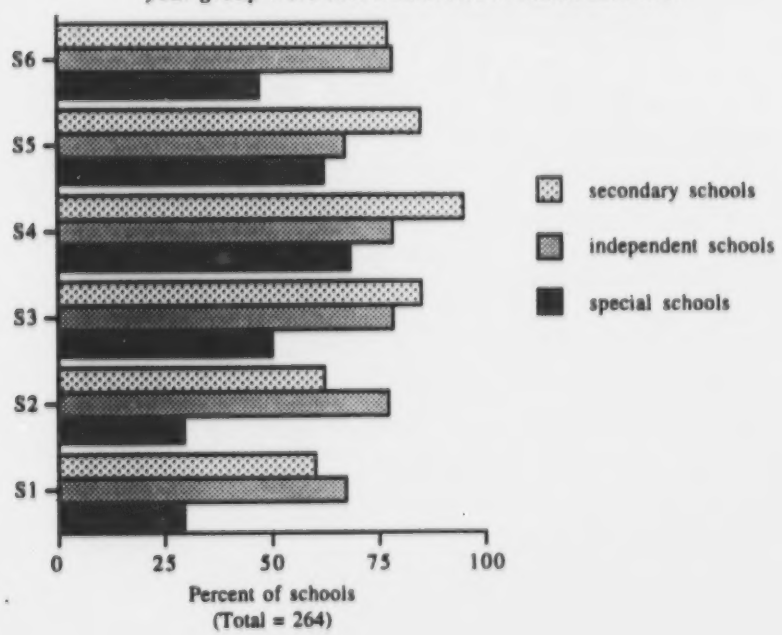
The 264 schools that were using the NRA were asked a series of questions about the actual practices associated with the NRA in their schools. A distinction was made between the process that a pupil might go through before completing the NRA document and the production of the NRA document itself. Thus it was recognised that pupils may be doing a range of activities which formed part of the NRA process which may not necessarily relate directly to the production of their NRAs.

The NRA process

It was recognised that schools might not be doing NRA-related activities with all pupils in all year groups. In order to find out the proportions of schools starting NRA-related activities with pupils in S1, schools were asked what proportion of pupils in each year group were involved in NRA-related activities. NRA-related activities were defined in the questionnaire as 'activities aimed at the production of the NRA document itself and activities which are specifically aimed at the development of skills and concepts which will enable pupils to complete the NRA document at a later stage in their school career'.

Overall 64% of schools were starting NRA-related activities with at least some of their S1 pupils. In over 80% of schools all pupils in years S3-S6 were involved in NRA-related activities. Figure 5.4 shows, however, that for every year group fewer special schools than independent or secondary schools were using the NRA with all their pupils.

Figure 5.4: Percent of schools that were using the NRA that said that all pupils in a year group were involved in NRA-related activities

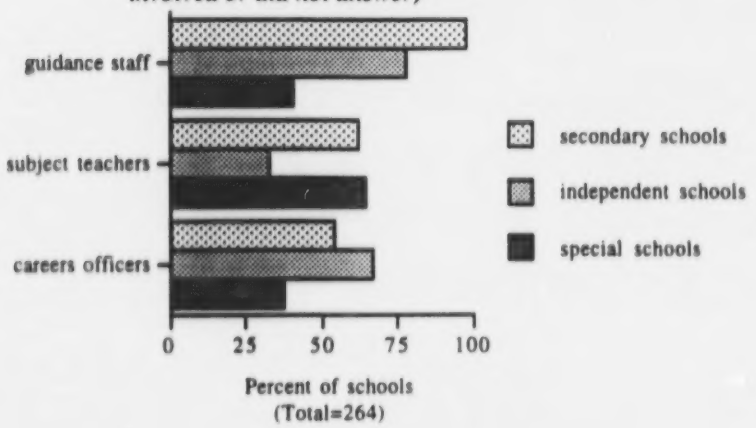


Schools were also asked in which year the majority of pupils began to record achievement in a formal way to enable them to complete the NRA document at the end of their school career. Overall, almost three-quarters (74%) of the sample indicated that pupils began this in S3 or S4. The picture emerging is therefore that the majority of schools are commencing formal NRA-related activities in S3 or S4, but that many schools are doing activities with pupils in S1 and S2 that are a relevant part of the NRA process.

In order to determine whether the NRA process was being done in isolation in the curriculum or whether NRA-related activities were occurring across the curriculum, schools were asked which members of staff were involved in NRA-related activities with pupils and where in the curriculum these activities were occurring.

Figure 5.5 shows which members of staff were involved in the NRA process. Overall 90% of schools indicated that guidance staff were involved in the NRA process with pupils, however, the graph shows that while this was true for 98% of secondary schools and 78% of independents it was true for only 41% of special schools. It should be noted,

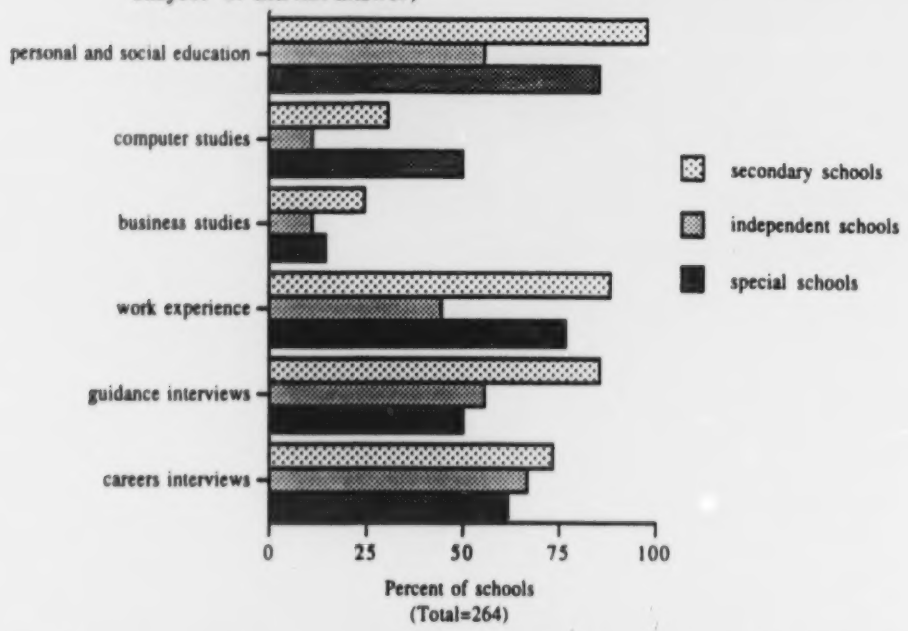
Figure 5.5: Schools saying these staff were involved in NRA-related activities with pupils (those not represented either said this member of staff was not involved or did not answer)



however, that, while special schools have guidance structures, they may not use the term 'guidance' to describe them. Some independent schools may also be unfamiliar with the term. Overall, about half the schools (52%) indicated that careers officers were involved and the majority (62%) indicated that subject teachers were involved. When asked to specify which subject teachers were involved, the most popular answer given (39%) was that all subject teachers were involved. It should be noted, however, that on the basis of the data gathered, it is not possible to say anything about the exact nature or extent of their involvement. It can be assumed that this would vary from school to school. It is clear, therefore, that guidance staff were involved in the NRA process in most of the schools, and that subject teachers were also involved to varying degrees in well over half of them.

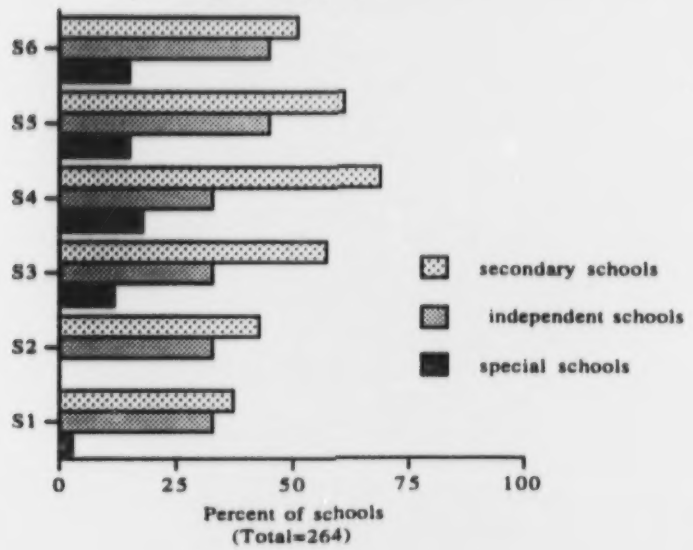
Schools were also asked to specify in which areas of the curriculum NRA-related activities were occurring. Figure 5.6 shows that the majority of schools were doing NRA-related activities in personal and social education (PSE), in work experience, through guidance interviews and through careers interviews. NRA-related activities were occurring in some schools in subjects such as computer studies or business studies and in a few schools in English or other subjects.

Figure 5.6: Areas of the curriculum in which NRA-related activities were occurring in schools using the NRA (those not represented either said 'not in this subject' or did not answer)



Schools were asked to detail when and how often pupils went through the individual action planning process during their school careers. The individual action planning process was defined as the cycle of activities including recording and reviewing achievement, setting goals, devising targets and drawing up an action plan. Figure 5.7 shows the proportion of schools that were doing action planning at least once with pupils

Figure 5.7: Proportion of schools that were doing action planning with their pupils in schools using the NRA (those schools not represented either did not answer the question or indicated that they were not doing action planning in that year)



in a year group. Overall a higher proportion of secondary schools were doing action planning than independent or special schools. In fact, very few special schools indicated that they were doing action planning at all. However, this may be because they are unfamiliar with the term 'action planning' rather than because they are not doing it. In the schools that were doing action planning, pupils were going through the action planning process on average approximately twice in each year. It is important to note, however, that there was a huge variation in the answers given to this question, with some schools indicating that their pupils were going through the process as many as 27 times in a year and others responding that it was happening only once.

Schools were asked how they would describe the link between the individual action plan (IAP) done as part of the NRA and the careers action plan (CAP) which is usually written for a pupil by a careers officer after a careers interview. Only 181 of the schools answered this question. Overall about one third said that there was no link, just over one third said that the IAP informed the CAP process and just under one third said that the influence was in the opposite direction.

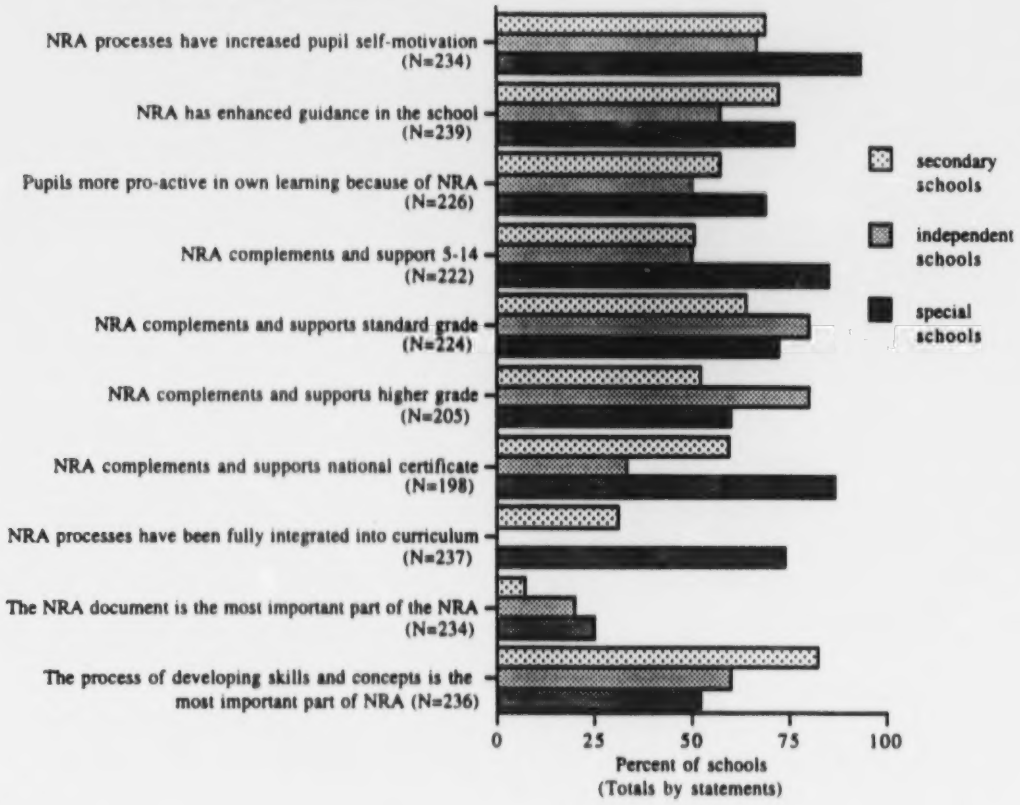
Schools were asked whether the NRA was integrated into their formal procedures for individual pupil assessment and recording. This was happening in over half the special schools (52%), but in a smaller proportion of the secondary (23%) and independent schools (13%).

Schools were asked to estimate how many pupils arriving from primary schools brought documents, skills or experience which were directly useful to the NRA-related activities that they would undertake in the school. The majority of respondents indicated that no pupils at all or less than half were bringing relevant documents, skills or experience.

In order to find out the impact of the NRA in schools, the degree of integration of the NRA with the curriculum and other initiatives and respondents' views of the relative importance of the NRA process and product, respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements (Figure 5.8).

Overall the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that NRA processes had increased pupil self-motivation in the school, had enhanced guidance and made pupils more pro-active in their own learning. The majority overall also agreed that the NRA complemented and supported the 5-14 development programme, Standard Grade, Higher Grade and the National Certificate. Overall only just over one third of the schools (35%) who were using the NRA indicated that NRA processes had been fully integrated into the curriculum. Figure 5.8 shows that this was true for the majority of special schools, but for only about one-third of secondary schools and no independent schools. Overall 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'the process of developing skills and concepts is the most important part of the NRA'. A few (9%) agreed or strongly agreed that the NRA document was the most important part of the NRA and 14% of respondents agreed with both statements.

Figure 5.8: Percentage of schools that were using the NRA agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement

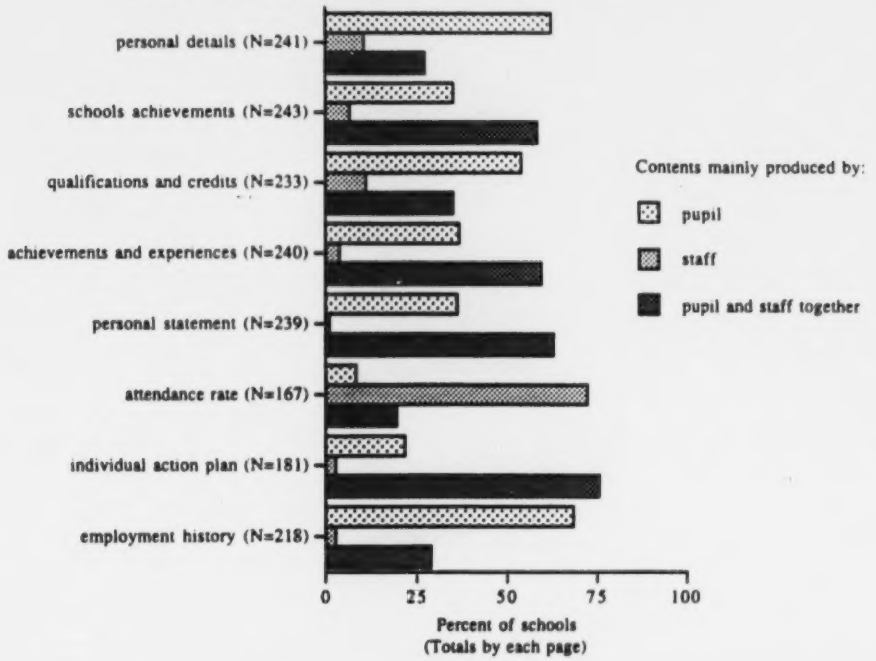

NRA processes have increased pupil self-motivation (N=234)
NRA has enhanced guidance in the school (N=239)
Pupils more pro-active in own learning because of NRA (N=226)
NRA complements and support 5-14 (N=222)
NRA complements and supports standard grade (N=224)
NRA complements and supports higher grade (N=205)
NRA complements and supports national certificate (N=198)
NRA processes have been fully integrated into curriculum (N=237)
The NRA document is the most important part of the NRA (N=234)
The process of developing skills and concepts is the most important part of NRA (N=236)
secondary schools
independent schools
special schools
0
25
50
75
100
Percent of schools
(Totals by statements)

Production of the NRA document

In order to find out about the processes involved in actually compiling the NRA document, schools were asked who was mainly responsible for producing the contents of each page and whether each page was produced as a result of an interview, work in groups or some other method. Figure 5.9 shows that, in general, pupils were producing the personal details, qualifications and credits and employment history pages by themselves in the majority of schools. It also shows that the school achievements, achievements and experiences, personal statement and individual action plan were most often being produced by pupils and staff together. The attendance rate page was not being used in every school (one region does not use it), but when it was being used it was generally being produced by a member of staff. In special schools, pupils were generally receiving the assistance of staff with all the pages of the NRA except for the attendance rate page which was filled in mostly by a staff member.

In the majority of secondary and independent schools, pupils worked in groups to produce the personal details, school achievements, qualifications and credits, achievements and experiences and employment history pages. For the personal statement, the picture was mixed. Just under half (44%) of the secondary schools used group work, about one third (36%) used interviews and a small number (16%) used both. In the majority of special schools, all the pages except the attendance rate were produced as a result of one-to-one contact with a member of staff.

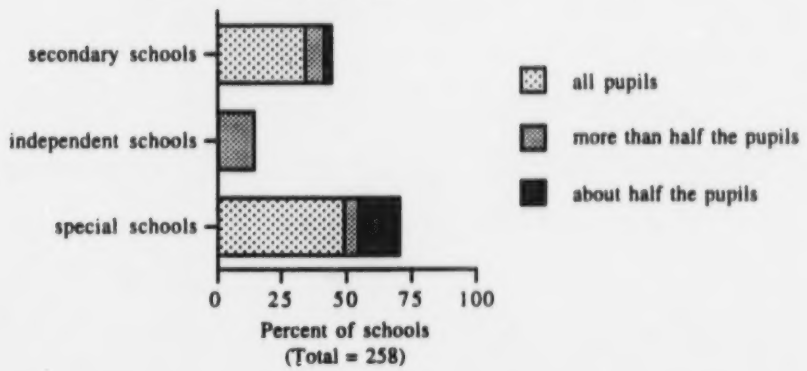
Figure 5.9: The person mainly responsible for producing the contents of each page of the NRA in schools that were using the NRA



Schools were asked whether they added any other pages to the NRA document. A higher proportion of the special schools (52%) than of the secondary schools (38%) or the independents (14%) responded that they did. Just under half of the special schools (42%) that did add pages to the NRA were adding photographic or video evidence. Of the secondary schools that added to the NRA, about one third (33%) added certificates and a slightly higher proportion (38%) added reports or references from work experience placements.

Schools were asked what proportion of their pupils used computers when they were compiling the NRA document. Seventy percent of the special schools responded that about half or more of the pupils were using computers to compile their NRAs. The same proportion of pupils were using computers in 44% of secondary schools and only 14% of independent schools. These figures are displayed in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.10: Proportion of pupils using computers to compile their NRAs in schools that were using the NRA



The NRA and leaving school

Those schools that were using the NRA were asked whether their pupils had been made aware of how they might use their NRAs after leaving school and also whether they had liaised with any other users of the NRA.

In the large majority of schools (over 90%), pupils had been made aware of how they might use their NRAs in the transition from school to work, training or further and higher education. Pupils in over 90% of schools had also been encouraged to continue to update their NRAs after leaving school.

Schools were asked whether they had liaised with any external bodies to promote the NRA to them as a tool for use in selecting or advising young people (Figure 5.11). They were also asked whether they had liaised with any other users to ask for feedback from them on the NRA (Figure 5.12). Overall the majority of schools had not liaised with employers, training organisations or institutions of further and higher education to promote the NRA to them.

Figure 5.11: Schools that were using the NRA which had liaised with other users to promote the NRA to them

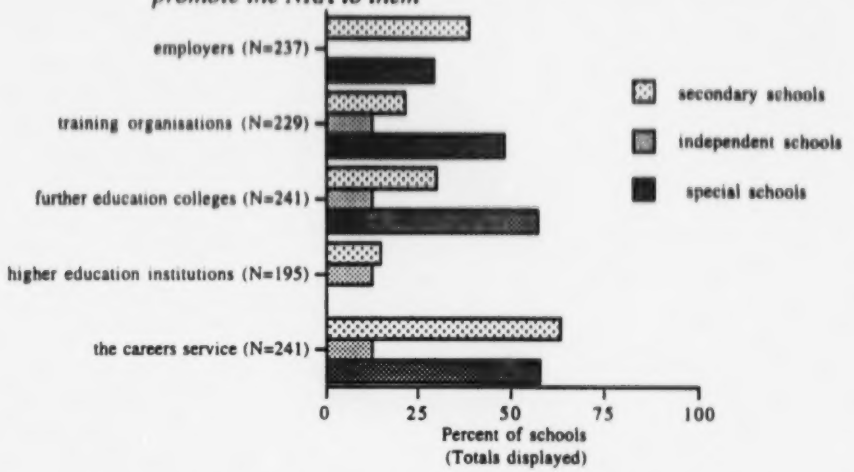
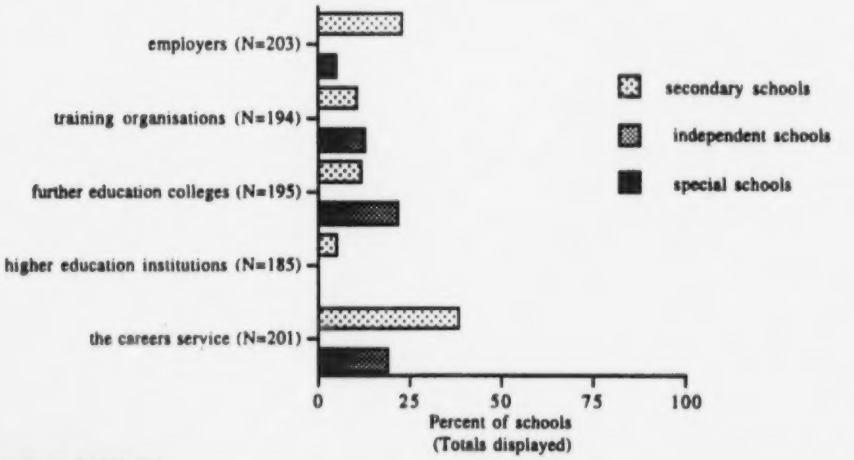


Figure 5.12: Schools that were using the NRA which had liaised with other users to receive feedback on the NRA



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However, about half the special schools (48%) had promoted the NRA to training organisations and 57% had promoted it to further education colleges. The majority of secondary schools (63%) and special schools (58%) had promoted the NRA to the careers service. Overall, few schools had liaised with employers, training organisations, institutions of further and higher education or the careers service in order to receive feedback from them on how to make the NRA more useful to them.

Factors affecting use and attitudes towards the NRA

A series of chi-square tests were carried out to determine whether having a written policy on the NRA, previous use of an RoA or TVEI funding had had any effect on use of the NRA or attitudes towards it. The differences reported here are all statistically significant at the level $p<0.05$ (ie there is a probability of less than 5% that the differences occurred by chance). It was not possible to carry out statistical tests to determine whether there were differences between the schools in different EAs in terms of their use or attitudes towards the NRA as there were too few schools that had responded to the questionnaire in each EA for the tests to be valid.

Some of the differences between schools with a written policy on the NRA and those without a written policy were interesting. Those schools with a written policy on the NRA were slightly more likely to do NRA-related work in guidance interviews than schools without a written policy. They were more likely to say that the individual action plan was critical to the value of the NRA. They were more likely to say that the NRA was valuable to high attaining pupils. They were more likely to agree or strongly agree that NRA processes had been fully integrated into the curriculum. They were more likely to have promoted the NRA to the careers service and more likely to have received feedback about the NRA from employers, training organisations and the careers service. Finally, they were more likely to say that the school management team had reacted very favourably to the introduction of the NRA (see next section). For most other responses there were no statistically significant differences between schools with and without a written policy on the NRA.

There were few significant differences between schools that had used an RoA before the NRA and those that had not. The few differences that were significant tend not to be very meaningful. For example, schools that had used an RoA before were more likely to say that the employment history page was critical to the value of the NRA and more likely to add extra pages to the NRA. They were less likely to say that careers officers were involved in NRA-related activities and less likely to carry out NRA-related activities in career interviews.

There was only one difference between schools that had received TVEI funding and those that had not which was statistically significant and valid: those schools that had received TVEI funding were slightly more likely than schools that had not received TVEI funding to have promoted the NRA to employers.

Views of the NRA

Respondents in schools that were using the NRA were asked for their views of the NRA. They were asked how important they thought the individual pages of the NRA were, how valuable they thought the NRA was to different groups of pupils and how they thought people had reacted to the introduction of the NRA in the school. They were asked to describe the problems with a full implementation of the NRA in the school and to identify

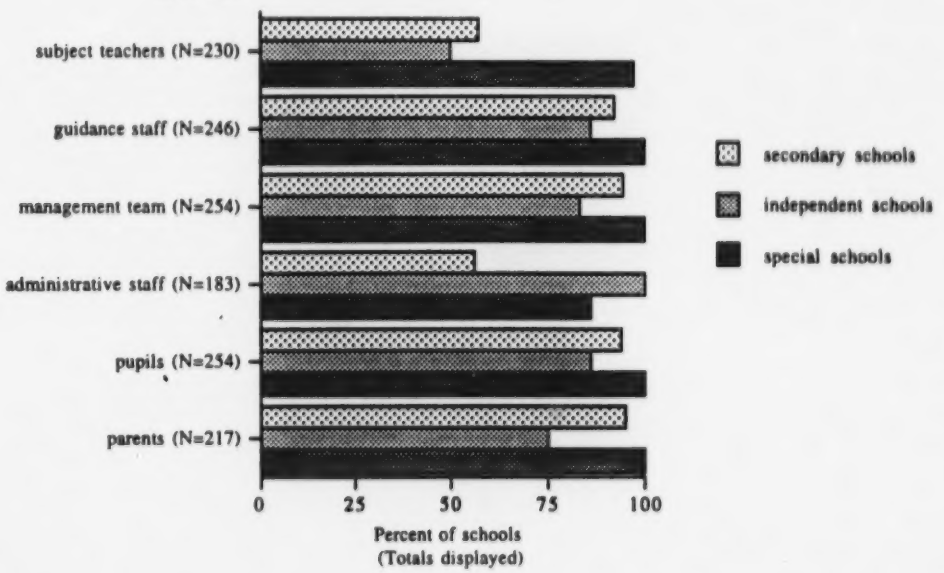
what kinds of support would help with these problems. Finally, they were asked to describe what they saw as the benefits of the NRA.

Over 85% of the respondents thought that the personal details, personal statement, school achievements, qualifications and credits and achievements and experiences pages were critical to the value of the NRA as a record of achievement. About two-thirds thought that the individual action plan and the employment history were critical to its value, but only 46% thought this of the attendance rate page. One region was not using the attendance rate page which may have biased this result. However, when the answers given by the schools in this region were removed, still 50% of schools thought the page was not critical to the value of the NRA.

The majority of respondents indicated that they thought that both the NRA document and the NRA process were valuable to pupils of all abilities. Eighty-nine percent or more of respondents said they thought the process was valuable to all pupils and 85% or more thought the document was valuable to low attaining pupils, middle range pupils and pupils with special needs. A slightly smaller majority (73%) said they thought the document was valuable to high attaining pupils.

Respondents were asked for their impressions of how different groups had reacted to the introduction of the NRA in their schools. Figure 5.13 shows that, in general, the large majority of respondents thought that guidance staff, management staff, pupils and parents had all reacted quite favourably or very favourably to the introduction of the NRA. Most respondents in special schools also thought that subject teachers (97%) and administrative staff (86%) had reacted favourably to the NRA. Fewer respondents from secondary schools (57%) and independent schools (50%) thought that subject teachers had reacted favourably and only just over half (56%) of secondary school respondents thought that administrative staff had reacted favourably.

Figure 5.13: Respondents who said these groups reacted quite favourably or very favourably to the introduction of the NRA in schools that were using the NRA



Respondents were asked what they saw as the problems or obstacles associated with a full implementation of the NRA in their schools. The majority of respondents (72%) indicated that time was a problem. Some respondents simply wrote 'time' on the questionnaire. Others mentioned the amount of time required for individual pupil interviews or the amount of guidance staff and subject teacher time required to fully implement the NRA with all pupils. Other problems mentioned were problems with computer facilities, administrative problems, convincing subject teachers of the value of the NRA, funding, pupil's difficulties or reluctance in completing the NRA, limited recognition by employers and integration of the NRA into the curriculum. All these were mentioned by less than 20% of respondents. Table 5.4 lists the most popular answers given to this question. A comparison of Table 5.4 with Table 4.2 shows that time was also mentioned as a problem by two-thirds of EAs. The problem mentioned by most EAs, however, was the lack of national advertising of the NRA, which was indicated as a problem by only 9% of schools.

Table 5.4: Problems or obstacles associated with a full implementation of the NRA in the school (Total = 242)

	*Percentage of respondents mentioning this problem**
Time	72
Software/hardware problems	19
Administrative problems	17
Convincing subject teachers of the value of NRA	14
Funding	12
Pupils' reluctance or lack of skills	9
Limited recognition by employers/lack of national advertising	9
Integration into the curriculum	6
Complexity/size of the task	6
Resources	4
No obstacles	3

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one problem.

Respondents were asked what additional support they thought would help with these problems. Not surprisingly, just under half the respondents indicated that more time would be helpful. Other types of support mentioned were computer facilities, clerical staff time, funding, staff development and promotion to external users. Table 5.5 displays the most popular answers given to this question.

Table 5.5: Additional support that respondents thought would help with the problems mentioned (Total = 218)

	*Percentage of respondents mentioning this type of support**
Time	45
Software/hardware	22
Clerical staff time	22
Funding	18
Staff development	16
Promotion to external users	14
Subject teachers' commitment/involvement	4
More resources	4

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support.

Respondents were asked what they saw as the benefits of the NRA. The most popular answer, which was given by about one quarter of the respondents, was that the action planning process was beneficial to young people. Various other answers were given. The most popular ones are listed in Table 5.6. Just less than one quarter of respondents mentioned that the NRA recognised achievements in and outside of school. Other benefits mentioned were that the NRA raises self-esteem, that it is useful in the post-school transition, that it increases motivation, that it makes pupils more pro-active in their own learning, that it is a valuable process and that it focuses on the positive. Each of these was mentioned by over 12% of the respondents. Both schools and EAs mentioned many different benefits of the NRA (see Table 4.3).

Table 5.6: Benefits of the NRA (Total = 239)

	*Percentage of respondents mentioning this benefit**
Action planning/target setting process	26
Recognition of achievements in and outside school	23
Raises self-esteem	20
Useful in post-school transition	19
Increases motivation	17
Pupils more pro-active in own learning	13
Valuable process	13
Focus on positive	13
A complete record of achievements/experiences	12
Provides full picture of pupil	11
Raises self-awareness	10
Self-assessment	10
Develops skills	10
Positive for less able children	8
Process of review/reflection	8
Pupils take pride in the document	7

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one benefit.

Final comments

Respondents were given space at the end of the questionnaire to make any final comments that they wanted to on their use of the NRA or on the NRA itself. A total of 137 respondents made comments. Over one quarter (27%) used the space to clarify some of the answers they had given on the questionnaire. Just less than one quarter (23%) made a comment on the general lack of awareness amongst employers and colleges of the NRA.

> The NRA is unlikely to assume the credibility it deserves until employers/admissions officers of institutions etc include it as an integral element of the interview process.

Just over one fifth (21%) of respondents made a positive comment on the NRA. One was particularly enthusiastic:

> Increases self-esteem. Promoting good relationships with members of staff. Preparation for next step in education process. Recognition. Ability to accentuate the positive. Ownership of document. Document for life.

A number (15%) mentioned problems with the NRA.

> It was a phenomenal strain to introduce - enormous amount of time and effort. Perhaps experience will cut this down, but my heart sinks at the thought of doing it all over again.

Several (10%) made comments on the cover or pages of the NRA.

> Quantities of materials supplied leave little or no allowance for errors, or ability to cope with increased numbers of students.

In addition to the survey data reported in this chapter the evaluation team visited four schools recommended by regional authority staff as sites of good practice in the use of the NRA. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the outcomes of these visits are reported in chapter 10 of this study.

Summary

- Overall 75% of the schools that responded to the survey were using the NRA or an equivalent. There were marked differences in the uptake of the NRA amongst different types of schools with 82% of secondary schools, 45% of special schools and 39% of independent schools using the NRA or an equivalent.
- Just over one third (39%) of the schools that were using the NRA had a written policy on it and almost all (96%) had a member of staff with responsibility for coordinating NRA-related activities in the school.
- TVEI had had an impact on the NRA in 89% of secondary schools and 82% of special schools. The end of TVEI would mean the loss of or reduction in some kind of support for the NRA in many schools, however, very few schools said that the NRA would actually stop as a result of the end of TVEI.
- 70% of schools said they had received staff development and 59% had received technical support for the NRA from their EAs. About half (51%) of the schools had received no financial help, 47% had received no professional staff time and 67% had received no administrative staff time.
- Pupils in the majority of schools were beginning to record achievement in a formal way in S3 or S4, but in many schools pupils were also doing activities which were relevant to the NRA in S1 and S2.
- Guidance staff were involved in the NRA process with pupils in 90% of schools and subject teachers were involved in it to varying degrees in 62% of schools. In the majority of schools, NRA-related activities were occurring in personal and social education, work experience and through guidance and careers interviews.
- In schools that were doing action planning with their pupils, the action planning process was taking place on average approximately twice in each school year.
- The majority of respondents agreed that NRA processes had increased pupil self-motivation in the school, enhanced guidance and made pupils more pro-active in their own learning.
- 35% of schools that were using the NRA indicated that NRA processes had been fully integrated into the curriculum in their schools.
- Overall, 76% of respondents agreed that the process of developing skills and concepts was the most important part of NRA, 9% agreed that the document was the most important part (and 14% agreed with both statements).

- In general, pupils were producing the contents of the personal details, qualifications and credits and employment history pages mainly by themselves. The school achievements, personal statement, achievements and experiences and individual action plan pages were most often produced by pupils and staff working together. In the majority of special schools, all pages except the attendance rate page were being produced as a result of one-to-one contact with a member of staff.
- Over 90% of schools were encouraging their pupils to continue to update their NRAs after leaving school and over 90% were telling their pupils how they might use their NRAs in the transition from school to work, training or further study.
- Very few schools had liaised with any other users of the NRA in order to promote the NRA to them or to ask for feedback on it.
- The majority of respondents said they thought that all pages except the attendance rate page were critical to the value of the NRA as a record of achievement. 50% of the schools that were using the attendance rate page said they thought it was not critical to the value of the NRA.
- The majority of respondents indicated that they thought that both the NRA process and document were valuable to pupils of all abilities.
- The main obstacle to a full implementation of the NRA in the majority of schools (72%) was the amount of guidance staff and subject teacher time it required.
- Respondents mentioned various benefits of the NRA including that the action planning process was beneficial, that the NRA recognised achievements in and outside of school and that it raised pupils' self-esteem.

In addition to the survey data reported in this chapter the evaluation team visited four schools recommended by regional authority staff as sites of good practice in the use of the NRA. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the outcomes of these visits are reported in chapter 10 of this study.

6 The Views of Young People

It is very important in an evaluation of this kind to seek the views of the young people who are actually working towards and completing NRAs. It was decided that a large-scale survey of school pupils was not the best way of collecting these views. The differences in terminology between the regions and between schools, and the lack of clarity of boundaries between NRA-related activities and the rest of the curriculum would have made survey data from pupils unreliable. Useful and in-depth data on the views of pupils of all ages were gathered during the case-study visits to schools and these are presented in chapter 10. It was important also to seek the views of young people who had recently left school as they might have experience of using their NRAs in the transition from school to work, training or further study and could comment on the NRA process that they had experienced at school.

This chapter presents the findings from three small-scale surveys of young people. First the views of young people who had recently gone into employment or training are presented. Second the views of young people who had just started courses at institutions of further or higher education are presented. Third, we have decided to supplement the information gained from pupils during the case-study visits and the two surveys of recent school-leavers by including the results of a small survey of S5 pupils carried out in one region as part of a TVEI evaluation of the impact of the NRA. (Thanks go to Renfrewshire TVEI for permission to include the results of this survey).

School leavers who had recently entered employment

A small sample of young people who had recently left school and entered employment or training were contacted and asked about their use of the NRA in the transition from school to their present position and about their continued use of the NRA as a record of achievement.

The sample

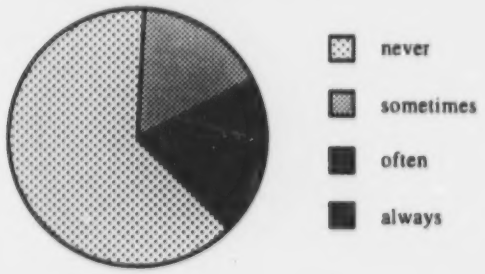
Fourteen employers and twelve training providers who had previously completed our telephone questionnaire about their use of the NRA in the recruitment of young people were each asked to identify up to five recent recruits who they knew had NRAs. A total of 50 questionnaires were posted to employers and training providers who then handed them out to their employees/trainees. A total of 30 questionnaire were returned completed. Twenty-one had been returned by women and 9 by men. Twenty-five out of the 30 respondents had left school in 1993 (11) or 1994 (14). All respondents had NRAs.

The questions and replies

1. The young recruits were asked about how many jobs and training places they had applied for before they started their present jobs and how often they had sent their NRAs with application forms.

- Twenty-four out of the 30 respondents had applied for up to three jobs or training places before they achieved their present posts.
- Out of 30 respondents, five always, one often and five sometimes sent some or all of their NRAs with application forms. Nineteen had never sent their NRAs or parts of it with application forms. Figure 6.1 illustrates these responses.

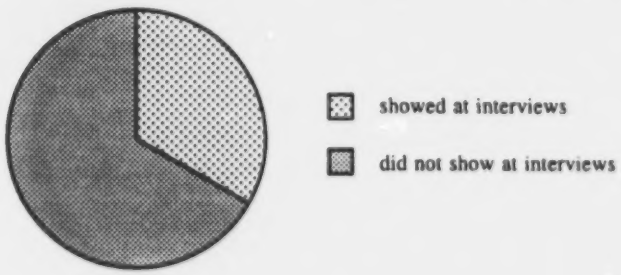
Figure 6.1: The frequency with which young people sent their NRA or parts of it with their application forms



2. The young people were asked if they had shown their NRAs in any interviews and, if so, how useful they thought their NRAs had been to them.

- Ten out of the thirty respondents said they had shown their NRAs at interviews. Figure 6.2 illustrates this.

Figure 6.2: The proportion of young people showing their NRAs at interview



- Eight young people said that they had shown their NRAs at the interviews for their present job or training place. During the interview the interviewer had picked out particular points of interest in the NRA to ask the candidate about. Of these eight, six thought the NRA had given the interviewer a fair overall picture of them, two did not know. Again, of these eight, seven thought the NRA was quite useful during the interview and one thought it was very useful.

3. The young people were asked if they were given any help while they were still at school on how best to use their NRAs when applying for jobs, training places or places at college and whether they had used their NRAs to help them make plans about what they would do when they left.

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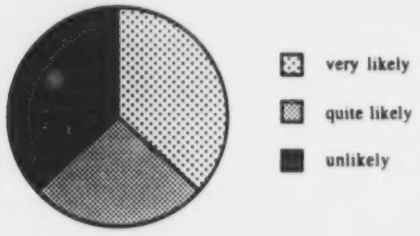
- Seventeen out of the 30 respondents said that their school had given them help on how best to use the NRA when applying for a job, training scheme or college place.
- Twenty-three young people had not used their NRAs while they were at school to help them make plans about what they would do when they left.

4. The young people were asked about the likelihood of their using their NRAs in the future when applying for a job, a place on a training scheme or a place at college.

- Nineteen out of the 30 respondents said it was very likely (11) or quite likely (8) that they would use their NRA in future when applying for a job, training scheme or college place. Figure 6.3 shows that the majority of the young people answering the questionnaire had a positive attitude about using their NRAs at future points of transition, for example, from training to a job.

Figure 6.3 The likelihood of young people using their NRAs in the future when applying for a job, a place on a training scheme or a place at college



Although Figures 6.1 to 6.3 show that a similar proportion of young people have been using their NRAs in their search for a job, a training place or a place at college, to those who said they are very likely to use their NRAs in the future in this way, they are not the same group of young people.

5. Respondents were asked if they had updated their NRAs since starting their present job and, if so, who validated these new entries to their NRAs.

- Twenty-three out of the thirty young people had not updated their NRA since starting their present job or training scheme but twenty-three said they would update their NRAs in the future.
- Only three respondents said their employer or training provider validated new entries in their NRAs.

6. The young people were asked if their employers/training providers had encouraged them to update their NRAs since they started work or training.

- Eleven respondents said their employer/training provider had encouraged them to update their NRA.

The fact that twenty-three respondents had not used their NRAs while they were at school to help them make plans about the future may indicate that the individual action plan is a relatively new page in the NRA and may not have been completed while our sample of young people were at school. Our sample will not reflect recent work done in school on the individual action plan.

Twenty-three young people said that they had not updated their NRA since they had started their present job or training scheme but they intended to do so in the future. It is likely that young people will update their NRAs at points of transition, such as when the young person leaves training or changes jobs.

Recent entrants to further and higher education

A sample of young people who had recently left school and started courses at institutions of further or higher education were contacted and asked about their experiences of the NRA at school, about their use of the NRA in making the transition from school to further study and about their continued use of it as a record of achievement.

The sample

Three further education and two higher education institutions were contacted and asked if they would each supply the names and addresses of 20 school leavers who had recently started courses at their institutions. The institutions had been recommended to us because it was believed that they were using the NRA either in the selection of students or in student development. Four of the institutions chose to distribute the questionnaires themselves to suitable students and the fifth supplied us with names and addresses. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed in October 1995 and 62 completed questionnaires were returned. Table 6.1 shows the proportions returned by students in further education (FE) and higher education (HE).

Table 6.1: Responses to the questionnaire for recent entrants to further and higher education

	No sent	*No returned*	*Percentages*
Further education	60	44	73%
Higher education	40	18	45%
Totals	100	62	62%

Thirty four of the students responding to the questionnaire were male and 28 were female. Most of them (89%) had started their courses in 1995 and the remainder had started in 1994. Just over three quarters of the sample (76%) had left school in 1995, about one fifth (19%) in 1994 and the remainder in 1993.

A series of chi-square tests were performed to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between the responses given by FE students and those given by HE students. Where any differences were found the number of respondents was usually too small for the tests to be valid. These have therefore not been reported.

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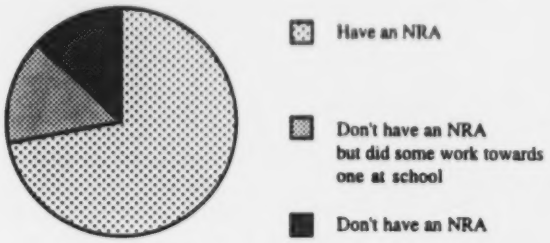
Possession of an NRA

Figure 6.4 shows that the large majority of the 62 respondents (72%) did have an NRA. A further 15% of the sample did not have an NRA but had done some work towards one at school. The remaining 13% did not have an NRA and had done no work towards one at school.

Figure 6.4: Proportion of students having an NRA

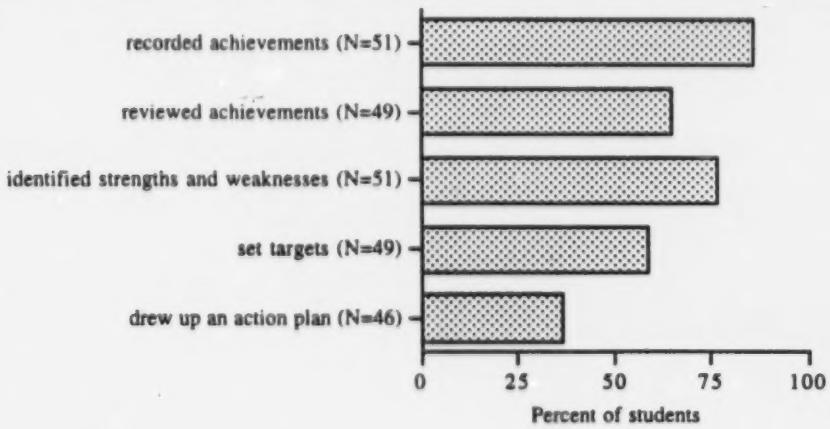


Experiences of the NRA at school

The 53 respondents (40 FE, 13 HE) who either had an NRA or had done some work towards one at school were asked a series of more detailed questions about their experiences of the NRA at school. This section refers only to these 53 respondents. They were asked whether they had done certain tasks at school to help them produce their NRAs, how helpful they had found these tasks, whether they would do any of them in the future, what they thought of the NRA document and whether they had found any parts of it difficult to complete.

Figure 6.5 shows that, overall, the majority of respondents had reviewed and recorded their achievements, identified their strengths and weaknesses and set themselves targets while at school to help them produce their NRAs. Just over one third (37%) had drawn up an action plan.

Figure 6.5: Students who did these tasks at school to help them produce their NRAs



Almost two thirds (63%) of the 53 respondents indicated that they had found these tasks helpful. When asked to specify in what ways the tasks had been helpful, almost one quarter (23%) said that they had helped them plan the future, 17% felt they had raised their self-awareness and 13% thought it had been helpful to review what they had done. The answers given to this question are detailed in Table 6.2.

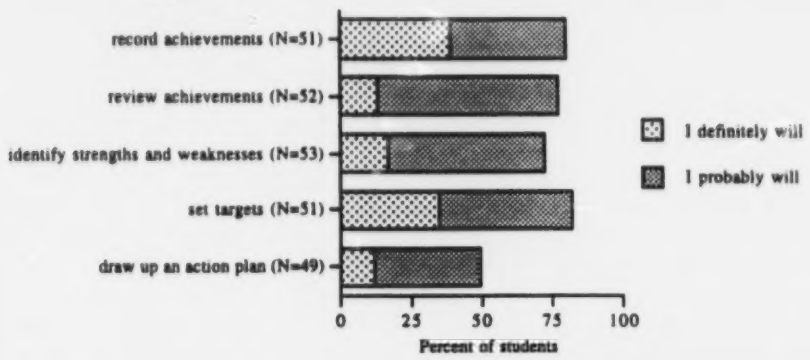
Table 6.2: Ways in which the tasks had been helpful (Total=32)

	*Percent of students mentioning this**
Helpful in planning future	23
Raised self awareness	17
Helpful to review what you've done	13
Helpful in improving self/addressing weaknesses	10
Helpful in making a next step/getting what I wanted	10
Helpful at interview/in making applications	10
Raised awareness of achievements	10
Helpful to record achievements in writing	10
Motivating	3
Shows you can evaluate yourself objectively	3
Useful to refer to NRA	3
Other	17

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one way.

Respondents were asked whether they thought they would do any of these things in the future. Figure 6.6 shows that the majority of students overall thought they probably or definitely would review and record their achievements, identify their strengths and weaknesses and set themselves targets in the future. Just under half (49%) said they probably or definitely would draw up an action plan. Those students who had indicated that they probably would not do one or all of the tasks in the future were asked to give reasons for their answers. Almost one quarter (23%) said that they did not feel the need to or that the tasks did not seem relevant to them, 18% said they already knew themselves and their plans and 14% said they did not like to work to plans. Other answers given (each by less than 10% of respondents) were that they could remember their achievements or plans, that they saw the tasks as a waste of time or that they did not know how to draw up an action plan.

Figure 6.6: Students who thought they definitely or probably would do these things in the future



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Students were asked what they thought of the design of the NRA folder and its loose leaf pages. The large majority (77%) of the 53 respondents made a positive comment about its appearance, saying that it was attractive, well presented, impressive, good quality, professional-looking, smart or stylish. A small proportion (13%) said they thought it was easy to follow or well organised. 13% commented that the loose leaf pages were a good idea because you could add or remove them from the folder and 10% said that it was useful for collecting information or certificates together.

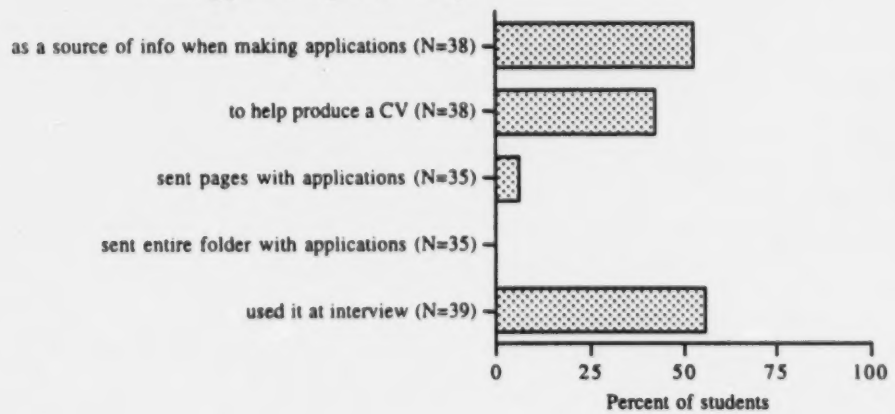
Only about one quarter (23%) of the 53 respondents indicated that they had found any parts of the NRA document difficult to complete. When asked to specify where their difficulties had lain, about one third (36%) of those who had experienced difficulty said they had found it difficult to write positively about themselves for the personal statement because it seemed boastful.

The NRA and leaving school

The 44 respondents who had an NRA were asked about their use of it in making the transition from school to further study and about how useful they had found it in making this transition. This section will refer to these 44 respondents only.

Figure 6.7 shows the ways in which respondents had used their NRAs when applying for jobs, training places or places at colleges or universities. Just over half the respondents overall had used it as a source of information when making applications (53%) or at interview (56%), 42% had used it to produce a CV. Very few (6%) had sent any pages with applications and none had sent the entire folder.

Figure 6.7: Respondents using their NRAs in these ways when applying for jobs, training places or further study



The 22 respondents who had used their NRAs at interviews had mostly attended between one and three interviews before starting their courses and almost all had used their NRAs at all interviews attended. Almost two thirds (63%) had used their NRAs at the interview for their present course.

The 14 respondents (13 FE, 1 HE) who had used their NRAs at the interview for their present course were asked how the NRA had been used in the interview, what sort of picture they thought the NRA had presented of them and how helpful they thought it had

been during the interview. The majority (64%) said that the interviewer had used the NRA to pick out particular points of interest to ask them about. A slightly larger majority (71%) thought the NRA had given their interviewer a fair overall picture of them and 86% said they had found the NRA quite useful or very useful during the interview.

Less than half the 44 respondents answering this section (45%) said they had been given help while they were at school on how best to use their NRAs when applying for a job, a place on a training scheme or a place at college or university. Forty one percent said they had used their NRAs while at school to help them make plans about what they would do when they left and almost all of these (94%) said they had found their NRAs quite useful in helping them to make these plans. The majority overall (74%) said it was very likely or quite likely that they would use their NRAs in the future when making applications for jobs, training or further study.

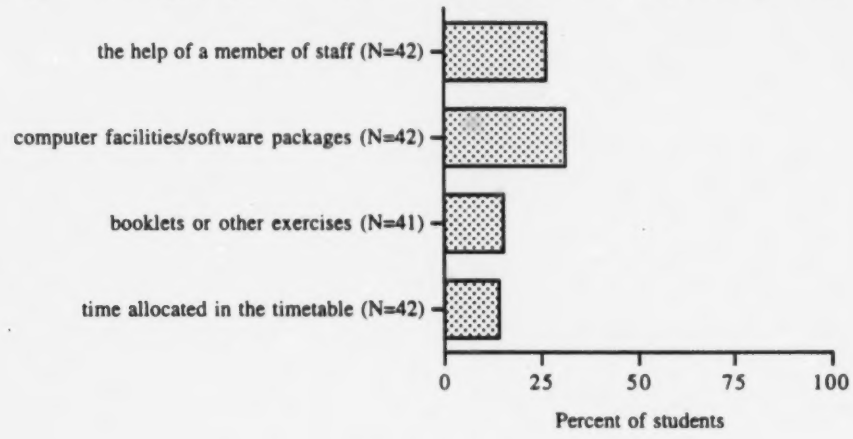
Continued use of the NRA at college or university

Respondents were asked whether their college or university had encouraged them to update their NRAs, whether their college or university provided any support to help with this and whether they thought they would update their NRAs in the future. This section refers to the 44 respondents who had an NRA.

A minority of students had been encouraged by their institutions to continue to update their NRAs. Only 39% of the FE students and 27% of the HE students said they had been encouraged to continue to update their NRAs by their college or university. It should be noted, however, that the questionnaire was being completed mostly by students who had only just started their first year of study and that institutions had not had a lot of time to do this.

When asked about the support provided by institutions to help them update their NRAs, generally few respondents indicated that their institutions provided the help of a member of staff, computer facilities, exercises, booklets or time in the timetable (Figure 6.8). It should be noted that a sizeable number answered that they did not know if these types of support were provided rather than saying that they were definitely not provided.

Figure 6.8: Support provided by institutions to help students update their NRAs



The large majority of respondents (91%) overall indicated that they thought they would update their NRAs in the future.

Final comments

The 53 respondents who either had an NRA or had done some work towards one at school were asked if they would like to make any final comments about their experience of the NRA or about the NRA itself. Twenty respondents chose to make comments. One quarter of these said that the NRA had been useful at interview or that they thought it would be in the future. One fifth said they thought they had not been given enough information at school about the NRA or its future use. Fifteen percent commented that the NRA had been helpful or useful to them and 15% said they thought the NRA was a good idea.

S5 pupils

This small-scale survey of S5 pupils formed part of a TVEI evaluation of the impact of the NRA in one region. Pupils were contacted and asked for their views of the NRA.

The sample

The survey was carried out in three schools in the Summer term of 1995. Questionnaires were given out to 105 pupils in S5 for completion in class time. In two of the schools, questionnaires were given out to one whole class of S5 pupils, 24 in one school, 22 in the other. In the third school, a sample of 59 S5 pupils was selected to complete the questionnaire.

Pupils were asked about their overall impressions of the NRA, about how helpful they had found completing the different pages of it and about their knowledge of how they might use it in the future.

Overall impressions

Pupils were asked how useful they had found the work they had done towards completing the NRA and also how useful they thought the NRA would be to them in the future. The majority of pupils seemed to have found their NRA work useful and said they thought the NRA would be useful to them in the future. The large majority (82%) said that their NRA work had helped them to be able to write down the qualities and skills that they possessed. Most (87%) thought that the NRA would be helpful or very helpful to them in completing application forms or writing CVs in the future and over three-quarters (79%) said they thought it would be useful in helping them to talk about their best points at interview. Only just over half of the pupils (56%), however, said that the work they had done towards completing the NRA had helped them to know themselves better, with the remainder saying it had not helped them in this way.

The pages of the NRA

Pupils were asked to assess how helpful they had found the activities that they had done in order to complete three of the pages of the NRA.

The school achievements page

Completing the school achievements page had, for some pupils (48%), raised their awareness of the skills they were using in their subjects. The remaining 52%, however,

said it had not been helpful to them in this way. For the majority of pupils (66%) finding out and recording these skills had helped them to increase their self-awareness.

The achievements and experiences page

The majority of pupils indicated that they had found working on the Achievements and experiences page of the NRA helpful to them. Just under two-thirds (63%) of the sample said that they had found analysing their work experience helpful or very helpful towards planning for the future. Fifty-nine percent said that writing about their hobbies, interests and personal strengths had been helpful or very helpful in planning for the future, the remaining 41% said that it had not.

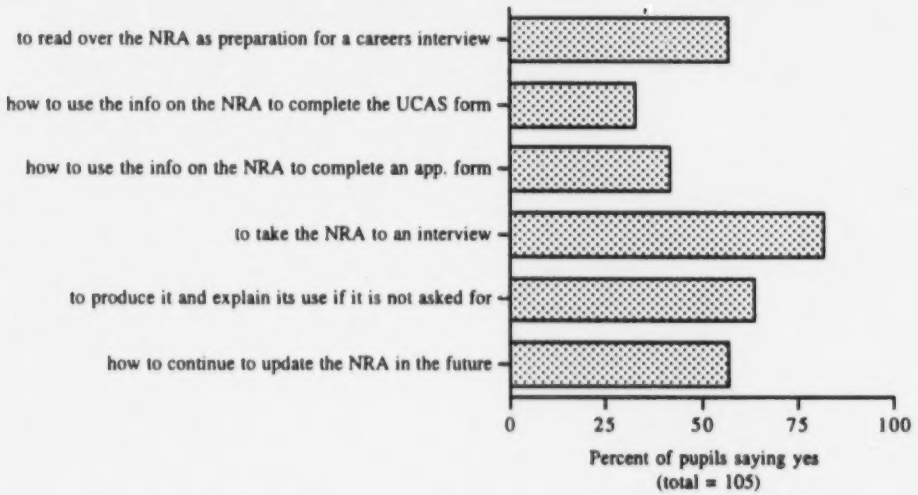
The personal statement page

The majority of the pupils questioned (59%) said that they had found writing about their personal qualities in their personal statements helpful in giving themselves a boost in self-confidence. However, over half (55%) said that the personal statement page had not helped them to get to know themselves better.

Using the NRA for future planning

Over two-thirds of the sample (68%) said that they had found the process of gradually collecting material towards the NRA helpful or very helpful in building up a thorough picture of themselves. Pupils were asked a series of questions about their knowledge of how they might use their NRAs in the future. The responses to these questions are shown in Figure 6.9.

Figure 6.9: Pupils' knowledge of how they might use their NRAs in the future


to read over the NRA as preparation for a careers interview
how to use the info on the NRA to complete the UCAS form
how to use the info on the NRA to complete an app. form
to take the NRA to an interview
to produce it and explain its use if it is not asked for
how to continue to update the NRA in the future
0
25
50
75
100
Percent of pupils saying yes
(total = 105)

The majority of pupils said they knew to use their NRAs to prepare themselves for interviews and that they should take their NRAs with them and use them in interviews. Over half (57%) said they knew to continue to update their NRAs in the future. However, the majority said that they did not know how to use their NRAs to help them to complete an application form (58%) or a UCAS form (67%).

Summary

This chapter reported the findings from questionnaire surveys of:

- 30 young people who had recently entered employment or training;
- 62 students who had recently started courses at institutions of FE or HE;
- 105 pupils in S5.

Use of the NRA in the transition after leaving school

- Very few school leavers had sent NRAs in with applications. One third of the employees/trainees and 56% of the FE/HE students had shown their NRAs at interview(s).
- The large majority of FE/HE students and employees/trainees who had shown their NRAs at the interview for their present position said they had found the NRA useful during the interview and that they thought it had presented a fair overall picture of them to the interviewer.
- 57% of the employees/trainees and 45% of the FE/HE students said they had been given help while at school on how best to use their NRAs when applying for jobs, training places or further study.
- 77% of employees/trainees and 59% of FE/HE students said they had not used their NRAs while at school to help them make plans about what they would do when they left.
- 63% of employees/trainees and 74% of FE/HE students said it was very likely or quite likely that they would use their NRAs in the future when making applications for jobs, training or further study.
- 77% of employees/trainees and 91% of FE/HE students said they thought they would update their NRAs in the future.
- 37% of employees/trainees and 36% of FE/HE students said they had been encouraged by their employers, training providers or institutions to continue to update their NRAs.

Experiences of the NRA at school (FE/HE students only)

- 72% of the sample had an NRA and a further 15% had done some work towards an NRA but not completed one at school.
- The majority of respondents had reviewed and recorded their achievements, identified their strengths and weaknesses and set themselves targets while at school to help them produce their NRAs. Only 37% had drawn up an action plan. The majority said they would probably or definitely do all these things in the future except draw up an action plan. This was partly because most of them had no experience of doing this. The majority (63%) said they had found doing these things at school helpful in planning for the future, raising their self awareness, addressing their weaknesses or had found it helpful to review what they had done.
- The majority of respondents (77%) made a positive comment about the appearance of the NRA folder.
- Only a small proportion (23%) indicated that they had found any parts of the NRA document difficult to complete. Some of those who had experienced difficulty had found it difficult to write positively about themselves for the personal statement.

The views of S5 pupils

- The majority of pupils said that the NRA process had raised their awareness of the skills they were using in their subjects and that they had found the process of gradually collecting material towards the NRA helpful in building up a thorough picture of themselves.
- Over half said that writing about their personal qualities had given them a boost in self-confidence. Only about half, however, said that the process had helped them to know themselves better.
- The majority said they had found the process of analysing their work experience and writing about their hobbies, interests and personal strengths helpful in planning for the future.
- They mostly said they knew how they might use their NRAs in the future and said they thought they would find them useful. The majority, however, did not know how they would actually use their NRAs to help them to complete an application form.

7 The Views of Careers Service Staff

The NRA is promoted to young people as a record which can be used to facilitate the transition from school to FE/HE, work or training. The careers services, through the work of the individual careers officers (known as careers advisers in some careers service companies), have a key role in helping school pupils make choices at these important transition points. The NRA can play an important part in this decision making process. The research team therefore decided to ask some careers service personnel about their work in schools, their views on the progress made to date (June 1995) in the process of drawing up the NRA and its use by school pupils in making the transition from school to FE/HE, work or training. Since April 1995 careers services have been put out to contract and in most cases are being operated by partnerships between Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) and local authorities.

The sample and questions asked

Eight careers service personnel were selected at random and asked if they would be willing to answer two questions over the telephone. Interviews were undertaken with eight careers officers including five principals. Two of the careers officers were undertaking secondments; one was seconded to work with a development agency on the Skillseekers initiative and the other was seconded to work with another development agency on the integration of the careers service action plan with the schools' NRA processes. These short telephone interviews took place in June 1995.

It is important to note that it is not possible to give a complete picture of careers services' work on the NRA from eight brief telephone interviews based on two questions. However, it is useful to have some insight into the work of some careers services.

The careers officers were each asked:

- What is the careers service role in developing the NRA or the individual action plan in schools?
- Are there any special initiatives that link in with the NRA that help to promote its use amongst employers or training providers?

The research team's aim was to obtain a snapshot of the type of work currently done by careers officers in schools on the NRA or individual action planning and with employers to promote the NRA.

The role of the careers officer

In secondary schools

We begin with a snapshot of the careers officer's work in schools drawing on this interview data and our knowledge of the careers officer's role. This is intended to give a context to the answers given to the research team's questions, rather than a complete description of the variety of work undertaken by all careers officers.

Careers officers are attached to particular secondary schools and offer continuity of careers guidance to pupils as they progress through school. They are involved in individual schools' careers education programmes and are aware of the process of constructing an NRA.

School pupils experience points of transition throughout their school life. The careers officer is involved with the pupils at these key transition points. For example:

- in S2 the careers officer offers guidance on subject choice that will have an impact on vocational choices at a later date;
- in S4, S5 and S6 the careers officer gives advice on, and helps in, the transition to S5, FE, HE, work or training. This help will be in the form of providing information on various courses of action available and making the young person aware of the vocational consequences of choices, for example between leaving school, and staying on at school.

The careers officer, through the careers interview, is in a position to help the individual pupil see the importance of the continual process of reviewing his/her NRA. Vocational plans need to be regularly updated as the pupil achieves, or estimates, future educational qualifications and becomes increasingly mature about his/her career ambitions.

It is in the vocational guidance interview, which usually takes place between S4 and S6, that the careers officer together with the pupil or on behalf of the pupil, can draw up an action plan. The action plan notes the career aspirations of the pupil in the light of school achievements and potential. The action plan can be based on the accumulated knowledge the pupil has gained about him/herself from undertaking the process of drawing up, re-working and refining an NRA, as well as on information provided by the guidance teacher. The action plan looks forward and sets out ways of achieving the young person's career aims. Even if the pupil does not bring the NRA to the interview with the careers officer the increased self-awareness resulting from constructing the NRA will be useful.

At the key transition point of leaving school the careers officer offers practical help in finding suitable further education courses, work or training. It is at this point that the careers officer can make the young person aware of the usefulness of the NRA product when applying for courses, work or a training place.

With employers

Careers officers have good regular contacts with employers in order to maintain up-to-date information on the nature of the work the employers undertake and to monitor job and training vacancies.

The careers services' action plan and the NRA process

It was clear from the eight telephone interviews that the major role of the careers services in the NRA process is in secondary schools, where careers officers draft an action plan with, or on behalf of, each S4 pupil.

The eight careers service personnel described the current focus of the action plan and how it is articulating with the NRA. They placed great emphasis on the importance of the process school pupils go through in producing their NRAs. One principal careers officer said that the process is more important than the product because the process 'feeds' the interview. The process of self-assessment and the review of achievements which a pupil undertakes in writing an NRA helps to clarify his/her vocational thinking.

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Service level agreements

Some careers services are beginning to draw up service level agreements (SLA) with their schools, other SLAs have been established for a few years. As one principal careers officer put it: 'the careers service input is not left to chance'. The service level agreements are very detailed documents. Each school has a negotiated agreement written down and all have similar objectives but the operation of the agreement will depend on the individual school. A service level agreement would be likely to map out the role of the school and the careers officer with regard to the key transition stages that pupils go through as well as the careers officer's contribution to supporting the schools' NRA process.

Careers services' work on integrating the action plan with the NRA

The eight interviewees described work done in their areas to facilitate and improve the articulation of the careers service action plans with the NRA.

Most of the eight said that the careers service's aim is to promote the NRA to young people and show them how to use the action plan as part of the NRA process. One careers officer said that the aim is not to have the careers interview in isolation from the NRA, it must not be seen as merely 'bolted on' to the end of the NRA. The careers officer has to negotiate 'entry' to the school at the SLA stage to participate in the school's careers education programme at the most appropriate point in the curriculum in order to make the NRA cohesive. It is therefore important that careers officers are aware of their schools' NRA planning so that they can enter the process at the appropriate point.

The focus of attention in the integration of the action plan with the NRA

The interviews with the eight careers service personnel indicated that different careers services have given priority to different groups of young people in the drawing up of action plans. The following information gives a brief overview of what is happening in the careers service in different areas.

Action planning pilot scheme

We were told by a principal careers officer that one careers service was involved in a regional pilot in two schools, working with pupils on action planning as part of the NRA. Additional resources were provided for the schools but not for the careers service. It resulted in a lot of extra work for careers officers. When the pilot was evaluated it was found that the young people were better prepared for the careers interview which improved the contribution that both pupils and careers officers would make to it.

Focus on S4

One principal careers officer said his careers officers are focusing on drawing up action plans for students who are leaving school at 16 years of age. They see it as important that the production of the action plan is part of a process rather than being just the production of a document. This careers service is in the process of developing the Skillseekers initiative, the aim of which is to help young people acquire training credits and is using the Skillseekers initiative as the current focus for action plans. This careers service is not making action planning available to all school leavers at present. In the future, S5 and S6 pupils will have action plans drawn up at points of transition, for example to university or college.

Focus on S4 to S6

Another principal careers officer said that in her area the careers service works on action planning with pupils in S4, S5 and S6. They are encouraged to bring their NRA to interview or the schools are asked to make the NRA available to the careers officers. What the pupils have done in the NRA process is incorporated with the careers service action plan. In this area pupils in S1 will have begun work on their NRA action plan which will focus on their school life and involve curricula and personal planning information. This information will be articulated with the careers service action plan in S4 and updated and reviewed in S5 and S6.

The use pupils are making of their NRAs

Some of our eight interviewees expressed concern about the currency of the NRA as seen by young people. They said that pupils are encouraged to bring their NRA to the careers interview but many do not. They saw this as a consequence of the school's NRA programme being still in the early stages of development.

NRA pages are too school-based

Although young people are encouraged to put their careers service action plan into the NRA and take it to interviews with careers officers, employers and training providers, some of our interviewees believe that they choose not to because they see the NRA pages as being too school-based. They said that the young people value it as a school record but they don't make the link to using the NRA in the transition to work, training or FE.

NRA too bulky to be reviewed in a guidance interview

One principal careers officer said that careers officers see the NRA as too bulky and not very productive in the guidance interview. They do not have the time to go through the NRA during the interview. However, they place great value upon the process the young people go through to produce the NRA. Other interviewees have commented that the process of writing the NRA enables young people to make better use of the careers interview because they have spent time considering their vocational goals.

NRA should be used as a resource

One careers officer said that the NRA should help the young people to complete application forms and produce CVs which in turn would benefit them in interviews with employers and training providers. (This point was also made by some employers completing our telephone questionnaire.)

The NRA process in the schools in which our careers service staff work

Our interviewees reported that all schools are using the NRA to some extent but some are further forward than others. This means that the level of information they give to careers service staff varies. In some schools pupils are well prepared for the careers interview but in others it is difficult to get hold of NRA information.

Inconsistency in the NRA product

One principal careers officer said that careers officers are reluctant to focus on the NRA with employers because they find that schools are not consistent in its production. Young people may not bring their NRAs to interview and when they do some of them will be

poorly presented. (Some training providers we interviewed also said that some schools were more advanced than others in helping young people to create an impressive final NRA product).

Pupils need to be more involved in the NRA process

Another principal careers officer said that many schools still have a long way to go in developing the NRA in the curriculum and getting the pupils to participate fully in the process. She stressed that the NRA should not just be seen as part of PSE.

Less able pupils need special help

A third principal careers officer said that less able pupils can find the production of an NRA threatening because of the amount of writing it involves. (One of the training providers we interviewed also made this point). Getting the sheets in the right order can give the less able pupil more confidence. Special schools are showing sensitivity to their young people by making sure that 'academic' pages such as the qualifications and credits page are not placed at the front of the folder. Other achievements are given greater importance by being placed at the front. (A teacher in one of our case-study schools made a similar point.)

Little help is available to show young people how to present their NRAs to employers

One careers officer said that schools have materials on how to produce the NRA but there are no materials specifically aimed at helping young people present their NRAs to employers in his area. Some schools are using mock interviews to try to promote the NRA in the transition from school to work. In three schools groups of teachers have worked to produce materials aimed at encouraging young people to take their NRAs to interviews with employers. A sub-contracted training provider carried out mock interviews to show the pupils how the NRA could be used. Most pupils did not have draft NRAs or even careers service action plans for this exercise but when the mock interviews were evaluated it was found that they had made a positive impression on the S4 and S5 pupils. One of the teachers involved expressed the view that mock interviews would also help the younger pupils to see the value of the NRA.

■ Employers' use of the NRA

The currency of the NRA with employers is seen as an important issue by the eight careers service staff we interviewed. Employers and training providers are not asking for the NRA although some of them are starting to complain that young people are not bringing their NRAs to interviews. These careers officers believe that employers and training providers must be targeted and made aware of the use of the NRA.

They said that since it is important for young people to 'own' their NRAs the responsibility for producing them at an interview is seen to lie with them. However, a significant level of self-confidence and maturity is required of a young person to present an NRA at an interview, when it has not been requested. It is not easy to take the initiative at sixteen years of age when faced with an adult who can affect your future.

Employers are unaware of the NRA
One careers officer said that when a 'stock taking' exercise was done on the NRA in his area it was found that employers' awareness of the NRA was low. The exception was where one school had very good relations with local employers and kept them informed.

Employers need to understand that the NRA can improve the recruitment interview
One of the principal careers officers said that the business world needs to understand what is happening in action planning and the NRA process. She felt that the NRA can help to make the interview more productive especially with those employers who are not skilled interviewers or who are out of touch with developments in school and have old-fashioned attitudes.

The role of the careers service companies in marketing the NRA to employers

Careers services are not resourced to market the NRA to employers although some marketing is done informally during visits of careers officers to businesses. Leaflets explaining the NRA may sometimes be handed to employers during these visits in order to raise awareness.

Focus on Skillseekers
A principal careers officer said that his careers service will be advertising the NRA to employers as part of the drive 'to get employers on board' on the Skillseekers initiative.

1995 marketing is not focused on the NRA
Another principal careers officer said that his careers service's 1995 marketing exercise to employers ties in a range of initiatives which include Skillseekers, work experience, teacher placement and special needs but the NRA is not mentioned. Our interviewee believed that some information on the NRA had been produced in 1994 by some other organisation to inform employers.

Who should be responsible for promoting the NRA to employers?
One principal careers officer felt that the onus lies with the education-business partnerships. (Education-business partnerships are potential catalysts for the NRA across the sectors of schools, FHE and employers. Their interest is to encourage the business world to provide good training and staff development opportunities, part of which could be the NRA process, although not necessarily the NRA document. The NRA is currently being taken up by some education-business partnerships on their own initiative.)

This principal careers officer went on to say that the careers service has a role in promoting the NRA but it is not the main player. She felt that promoting the NRA thoroughly would be a 'mammoth task'. In a large employing organisation awareness of the NRA can vary from department to department. (One of the employers we interviewed also made this point.) Visits have been made to a large number of employers over the year June 1994 to June 1995 by staff in this careers service and leaflets on the NRA have been given out, but there are still gaps in knowledge.

Attempts to promote the NRA to employers

Our eight interviewees were able to give examples of attempts to promote the NRA to employers.

Presentations

One careers officer said that in his area employers were invited to attend presentations to update them on the NRA and they were encouraged to ask candidates to bring their NRAs to the selection interview. This careers officer also suggested to employers that they might put a question about the NRA on their firms' application forms. The result of these presentations was that 'some employers are enthusiastic, others haven't been'.

Leaflets and brochures

Another careers officer said that in his area a training provider was sub-contracted to do a marketing exercise after which he suggested producing a leaflet and a brochure. The brochure gave a more detailed account of the NRA. The idea was that employers would see the leaflet and then request the brochure. To his knowledge employers have not asked for the brochure although some employers known to the training provider are making use of the NRA.

Telephone sales campaign

There was also a region-wide telephone sales campaign on the Skillseekers Pack which contained the NRA leaflet. Again, employers were expected to ask for the brochure but according to our interviewee they have not done so. However, he felt that Skillseekers is a relatively new concept and employers are probably more focused on how to get involved in the funding. The NRA and interviews are not at the forefront of employers' agendas. It seems that levels of awareness of the NRA drop when advertising stops and other issues of importance for employers come to the fore.

■ Summary

This is a summary of the views of the eight careers service personnel we interviewed.

- The major role of the careers service in the NRA process is in secondary schools where careers officers draft an action plan with pupils in S4, S5 and S6.
- Careers service staff place great emphasis on the importance of the process pupils go through in producing their NRAs. The process of drawing up an NRA helps to clarify a young person's vocational thinking.
- Careers service staff said that the currency of the NRA as seen by young people and employers was a key issue. Young people are not taking their NRAs to recruitment interviews and employers are not asking to see them. The profile of the NRA should be raised with both groups.
- Careers officers market the NRA to employers informally, during visits to businesses although careers services are not resourced to undertake marketing of the NRA.

8 Survey of Employers and Training Providers

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) is promoted to young people as a life-long document which offers them a format on which to record and update their achievements while they are in school, further and higher education, in training and in employment. As young people add to and record their skills in the NRA they will be able to adapt their individual action plans to suit their changing goals and needs at each transition point in their lives.

One of the points of transition the research team studied was that from school to training or a job. It is at this stage that the NRA can be used as a resource from which young people can select relevant information to put before training providers and employers, either on application forms or in the interview.

One of the aims of the NRA is that employers and training providers will benefit, either from focused applications, based on information contained in the NRA or from the rounded picture the NRA provides of a young person's broad achievements and aims.

A small sample of employers and training providers were surveyed, by means of a telephone completed questionnaire, on their use of the NRA. The telephone completed questionnaire was based largely on the one for employers, which was used by Research International, in their evaluation of the NRA, which they carried out on behalf of the Employment Department and Department of Education in England and Wales. (Thanks go to Research International and the Departments of Employment and Education for their kind permission to use this.)

The aims of the survey our research team carried out were:

- to establish the extent to which employers and training providers are using the NRA in recruitment and to gather their impressions of the NRA as a recruitment tool when compared to other methods of assessing young people;
- to establish how the NRA is being used in the workplace and in training to record the progress of and to set targets for young employees/trainees.

The sample

Three further education (FE) colleges based in the East, the North-East and the West of Scotland were each asked to provide the names of twenty employers with whom the college had links. The employer might be using the college for training staff, regularly recruiting employees from the college or using college consultancy or other services. The colleges did not know if these employers were using the NRA in the recruitment of school leavers or other young people who may have been to training since leaving school. From this total of sixty names fifty-nine contacts were made. It was found that few of these employers were using the NRA in recruitment and so nine of the Regional careers services were asked to supply more names. The careers services identified a total of twenty-seven

employers and eighteen training providers who were likely to be using the NRA in recruitment. The research team needed to focus on those employers and training providers who were using the NRA in selection in order to assess the usefulness of the NRA as a recruitment tool from their point of view. We also wanted to survey how employers and training providers were using the NRA with young people once they had been recruited into work or training. Out of the sample, over 350 telephone calls were made to key people responsible for interviewing and recruiting and training young people in 95 organisations throughout Scotland. These interviewees represented a wide range and size of businesses (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Employers' and training providers' type of work

Type of work	*Employers and Training providers*
Manufacturing	11
Services	7
Training	7
Government	5
Oil and related	4
Leisure Industry	3
Retail	2
Other	6

A total of 45 employers and training providers agreed to complete the telephone questionnaire (31 employers, 14 training providers). Just under half (43%) of the employers had less than 100 people working for them; 30% employed between 100 and 500 people and 27% employed over 500 people. Similarly, of the training providers, 42% employed less than 100 people, 33% employed between 100 and 500 people and 25% employed over 500 people.

Training providers are defined as including:

- training organisations whose prime function was to offer training places on youth training schemes;
- training organisations which were specifically set up to serve the needs of a particular group of employers;
- organisations who took young people on youth training schemes rather than as employees.

Many young people who successfully complete their training will be taken on as employees.

A total of forty-five formal telephone interviews were conducted using a structured questionnaire:

- seventeen were with employers **not** using the NRA in recruitment;
- fourteen were with employers using the NRA in recruitment;
- twelve were with training providers who were using the NRA in recruitment;
- two were with training providers who were using the NRA during training but not for recruitment.

Employers who did not wish to be interviewed gave a number of reasons:

- staff are recruited from agencies on short-term contracts;
- the employer had never heard of the NRA;
- young people had never presented an NRA at interview;
- the employer was not using the NRA in recruitment and had no time to talk;
- the employer was looking for physical attributes, not an NRA.

Recruitment methods

The sample of 31 employers and 14 training providers were asked to say, from the list shown in Table 8.2 what they normally take into account when considering applications from young people either prior to or during an interview.

Table 8.2: Preferred recruitment methods

Methods	*Employers not using NRA*	*Employers using NRA*	*Training Providers*
Letter of application	12	12	5
Completed application form	13	11	12
CV	11	12	11
School report	9	8	7
School reference	7	6	7
NRA	0	14	12
RoA	1	10	7
Your own psychometric tests	2	6	5
Individual action plan	3	4	3
Other	16	10	6

Table 8.2 shows that both employers and training providers place a heavy reliance on their organisations' own application form. Letters of application are favoured by employers but not by training providers. CVs are taken into account by more employers and training providers, who see NRAs, than by employers who do not see NRAs. Employers and training providers who use the NRA in recruitment are also much more likely to take RoAs into account. School reports and references do not figure highly with any group.

When employers and training providers were asked what other things they took into account when recruiting young people they focused on interview performance. Employers, especially those who do not take NRAs into account, place more emphasis on the face-to-face interview than the training providers.

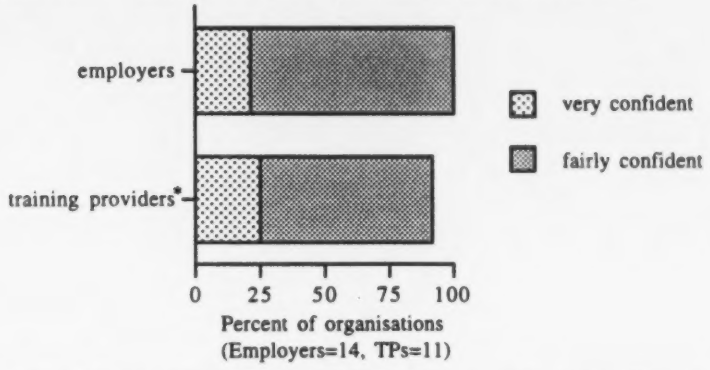
The remainder of this section refers only to those employers and training providers who were using the NRA in recruitment (14 employers, 12 training providers).

Perceived reliability of the NRA

Employers and training providers were asked to say how reliable and useful they found the various methods they used to recruit young people. These questions would show us the amount of confidence our interviewees had in the NRA as a recruitment tool when compared to other methods they were using.

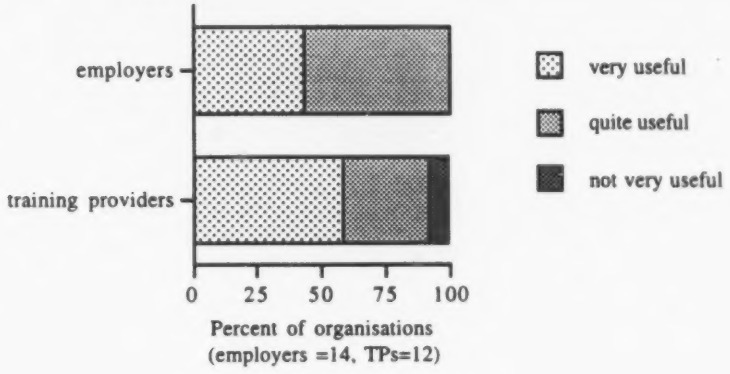
Both the employers and the training providers expressed confidence in the information given on the NRA with nearly a quarter of both groups saying they were very confident. More training providers (58%) than employers (43%) said they found the NRA very useful. However one training provider out of the twelve did not find the NRA very useful as a selection tool because the quality of NRAs varies according to the writing abilities of the young applicant. These findings are illustrated in Figures 8.1 and 8.2.

Figure 8.1: Confidence in the information given by the NRA



* One of the training providers would not express any level of confidence in the NRA

Figure 8.2: Usefulness of the NRA to employers and training providers using it in selection



Views on other methods of selection

- ***Completed application form***

All the employers (11) and all but one (11) of the training providers who emphasised the importance of their own application forms in recruitment expressed confidence in the information they elicit and said they found this information useful.

- ***CV***

A similar level of confidence is placed in the CV by those employers (12 out of 14) and training providers (11 out of 12) who take them into account.

- ***Records of achievement***

Both employers (10) and training providers (7) using RoAs in recruitment were confident of and found the information they provided useful.

- ***School report***

Just over half of the employers (8) and training providers (7) looked at school reports and the majority found them useful, however two training providers and one employer did not find them useful.

- ***School reference***

About half of the employers (6) and training providers (7) who took school references into account had confidence in the information they contained and found them useful.

- ***Psychometric tests***

Less than half the sample of employers (6) and training providers (5) made use of psychometric tests but the few who did use them found them useful.

- ***Individual action plan***

Very few employers (4) and training providers (3) looked at IAPs but those who did found them useful.

- ***Letter of application***

More employers (12) than training providers (5) took a letter of application into account. Both employers and training providers stated they were fairly confident about the information letters contained and four out of the five training providers found them useful but only eight out of the twelve employers did so.

Our overall conclusion from the limited number of employers and training providers completing the telephone questionnaire, is that those who are using the NRA to select young employees and trainees find it very useful.

The use of the NRA prior to and during the selection interview

The research team hoped to establish the extent to which the NRA was being used by employers and training providers before and during the selection interview, which pages of the NRA were helpful to respondents during interviews and in what ways the NRA had been used during interviews.

Prior to the interview

From the small sample of employers and training providers it would appear that very little use is being made of the NRA before the young applicants are interviewed. Only one employer asks for the NRA to be sent to him prior to the interview; none of the training providers ask candidates to send their NRAs in advance. However, a few young people were sending copies of selected pages from their NRA without being requested to do so.

Employers and training providers were asked if they requested applicants to bring their NRAs to their interview; the majority of employers (10) and training providers (9) did not. Nevertheless, some applicants were bringing their NRAs without being asked. Over one quarter of employers (4) and training providers (4) said that most of the young people they interviewed brought their NRAs without being asked to do so and eight employers and seven training providers said that a few of their interviewees brought their NRAs without being asked. Only two employers and one training provider said that none of their applicants had brought an NRA to interview to date.

During the interview

Employers and training providers were asked to identify which NRA pages they found helpful during the interview. The results are shown in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3: The number of respondents finding each page helpful during interviews (employers=14, training providers=12)

NRA pages	*Employers*	*Training providers*
Personal statement	8	11
Qualifications and credits	12	11
School achievements	10	11
Other achievements and experiences	9	10
Employment history	10	9
Attendance rate	9	10
Individual action plan	5	9
All pages	2	0

As can be seen from Table 8.3 most employers and training providers agreed that the qualifications and credits page was useful. Employers and training providers place significant emphasis on academic qualifications as an indication of whether a young person can do a job or cope with a specific type of training. Similar opinions were held about most other pages but more training providers valued the personal statement and individual action plan than employers. The training providers felt that the personal statement and individual action plan gave an indication of a young person's goals. The training provider could then plan to meet some or all of these goals in the training plan.

It is interesting to compare the results of the findings of this survey with those of the *School for Skills* report (1994) to see if employers' views of the usefulness of the NRA have changed. However, it is important to note that our sample of 31 employers is much smaller than the sample of 144 employers who were surveyed in 1993 for *School for Skills*. We cannot say that the small number of employers we surveyed gives a general reflection of the views of employers in 1995.

Forty percent of the sample of employers in the *School for Skills* report had seen an NRA which is similar to our findings of 45%.

It is difficult to make comparisons between the employers we interviewed and the employers interviewed in *School for Skills*. In general there seems no common pattern on which sheets of the NRA they found useful.

It is interesting to note, however, that the views of training providers in our sample were very similar to those expressed by the employers reported in *School for Skills*, with over three-quarters finding information on qualifications and credits and school achievements useful.

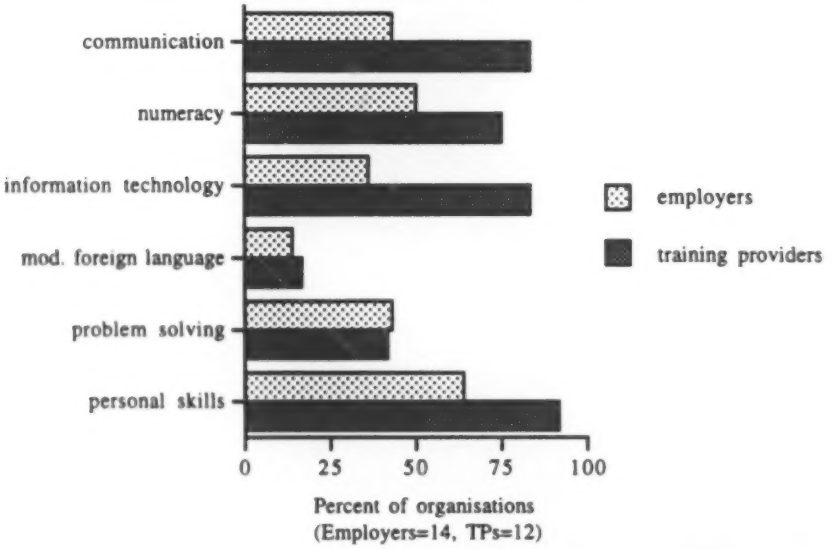
Respondents were asked how they had actually used the NRA during the interview. The majority of employers (12) and training providers (12) said that they picked out points of interest from a young person's NRA and used them as a basis for discussion. Many employers (10) and training providers (8) also let the young person refer to his or her NRA during the interview. Only a minority of interviewers said they used an

applicant's NRA as a basis for interview questions (4 employers, 5 trainers). This would be a difficult task given that employers and training providers are not asking young people to send them their NRAs prior to the interview.

How informative is the NRA?

Research International, who drew up the original telephone questionnaire on which ours was based, identified six general skills that young people might possess and which employers might look for in young recruits. Employers and training providers were asked if they used the NRA as a source of information on this list of six general skills. Figure 8.3 illustrates the interviewees' answers. It shows that a greater percentage of training providers than employers make use of the NRA as a source of information on the levels of certain skills possessed by young interviewees.

Figure 8.3: Employers and training providers using the NRA as a source of information on six general skills of recruits



Employers and training providers were then asked, for each skill, whether they thought the NRA conveyed the level of that skill well. Figure 8.4 illustrates their answers. It shows that training providers have a more positive view of the use of the NRA in conveying useful information about a candidate. The bar in Figure 8.3 representing information technology provides an example of the different use our sample of employers and training providers make of the NRA in assessing the level of skill attained by young people. The eleven training providers who look for skills in information technology use the NRA to provide information about the level of skill achieved by the young applicant. The training providers look for the grade obtained in computing Standard Grade and understand what this means in terms of the level of skill achieved. However, of the nine employers who look for information technology skills, five rely on the NRA to provide the relevant information but four prefer to use other sources of information, such as tests they administer and information on their own application forms. A number of employers said they had difficulty understanding the levels of achievement indicated by modules.

Figure 8.4: Employers and training providers who said that the NRA conveyed certain skills well

If employers and training providers did not use the NRA to determine the level of some or all of these general skills they were invited to say why. Those expressing reservations said they found other sources presented the information more easily. These 'other sources' were company application forms, tests and face-to-face interviews.

Employers and training providers were asked what their overall opinion was of the NRA as a good picture of an applicant. Eight employers and eight training providers thought it good and three employers and two training providers thought it a very good picture of an applicant. Three employers and one training provider thought it a fair picture. One training provider thought it neither good nor poor and one thought it presented a poor picture of an applicant. The training provider who thought that the NRA presented a poor picture of an applicant was concerned that young people who could not express themselves well in writing would not be able to do themselves justice in the NRA. In this respect the NRA could not offer parity of esteem to all young people.

The sample of employers and training providers interviewed had been using the NRA in recruitment for between one and four years with the majority of employers using it for one year and the majority of training providers using it for two years.

Extra information provided by the NRA

The research team wanted to find out if employers and training providers thought the NRA was offering them extra, useful information, over and above that provided by the other recruitment methods they were using. Interviewees were asked to say how the NRA compared with their own organisation's procedure for selection: is there any extra information which the NRA gives them which they find helpful? Table 8.4 illustrates the answers.

Table 8.4: Extra information provided by the NRA

Extra information	*Employers*	*Training providers*
Rounded picture of candidate	8	7
A discussion tool	3	1
Work experience information	2	1

■ Using the NRA instead of existing recruitment procedures

Respondents were asked how comfortable they would be to use the NRA instead of their existing recruitment procedures. Twelve out of the fourteen employers and seven out of the twelve training providers said they would be quite or very uncomfortable to replace their existing recruitment procedure with the NRA. Two employers and two training providers said they would be neither comfortable nor uncomfortable and two training providers said they would be quite comfortable to replace their existing procedure with the NRA.

Employers and training providers were also asked what changes, if any, would need to be made in order for them to be comfortable with the NRA as the **sole** means of selecting candidates.

- Ten employers and five training providers said that the NRA would form part of the total process but never be the sole means of selection.
- Nine employers stressed the importance of the face-to-face interview.
- Five training providers said that their own testing procedures were needed.
- Two employers and two training providers said that the NRA should list referees or contain references.
- One employer made the point that his organisation's application form allowed school leavers to be compared on an equal footing to older candidates who did not possess NRAs.

■ Use of the NRA for employee/trainee development

The research team aimed to establish how the NRA was being used in work and training to record young recruits' achievements and plan the development of new skills.

Fourteen employers and 14 training providers were asked if their organisations were using the NRA for employee/trainee development. Only 4 of the 14 employers and 6 of the 14 training providers said they were using the NRA in this way. This small number were using the NRA to draw up future education plans and to record and measure development. The training providers also mentioned using the NRA to start to identify training needs. All six training providers and three of the four employers who were using the NRA for employee/trainee development were validating the entries that their young recruits made to update their NRAs. Five employers and two training providers did not know if anyone in their organisations validated the entries young recruits were making to their NRAs.

Thirteen employers and eleven training providers said they develop training plans or individual action plans with their employees/trainees. However, for the majority of employers and training providers these plans do not form part of the NRA. Many employers and training providers in our sample saw the NRA as a document that is wholly owned by the young person and so the young person may choose whether or not to add his or her newly acquired SVQs to it. However, employers and training providers may **encourage** young people to update their NRAs. Only three employers and four training providers made training plans or individual action plans part of the NRA. Table 8.5 illustrates this information.

Table 8.5: How employers and training providers are using the NRA for employee/ trainee development

	Employers (Total=14)	*Training providers (Total=14)*
Using the NRA for employee/trainee development	4	6
Validating young peoples' entries to their NRAs	3	6
Unsure if their organisation validates young peoples' entries to their NRAs	5	2
Developing training plans or IAPs* with young recruits	13	11
Developing training plans or IAPs with young recruits which are part of the NRA	3	4

* Individual action plans

Summary

- Out of 95 organisations approached, only 45 agreed to be interviewed (31 employers, 14 training providers). Those not wishing to be interviewed had never used the NRA in selection, had never heard of it or did not feel it was appropriate to their needs.
- 14 of the 31 employers and 12 of the 14 training providers interviewed were using the NRA in selection.
- All but one of the 26 organisations using the NRA in selection said they found it useful.
- Very few of the employers or training providers using the NRA in selection were asking for NRAs to be sent prior to interview or asking applicants to bring their NRAs to interview. Most of those using NRAs in selection were using them when young people brought them to interviews without being asked.
- Almost half of the training providers (6) and 4 of the 14 employers were using the NRA for employee/trainee development. Almost all (13 employers, 11 training providers) were developing training plans or individual action plans with young recruits. However, very few (3 employers, 4 training providers) were developing these as part of the NRA.

Informal comments about recruitment and the NRA

Some of the sample of forty-five employers and training providers who responded to the telephone survey also chose to make several informal comments about some of the issues raised by the questionnaire with regard to recruitment. Nine further employers preferred to talk informally rather than answer our questions.

We have used these comments to offer a snapshot of the current attitudes of this sample of employers and training providers towards the NRA compared to other methods of recruitment. A number of the comments indicate that some employers and training providers lack awareness and understanding of the NRA.

Even from this small sample, a complex picture emerged of the kinds of training and employment offered to young people. It was not the purpose of this evaluation to investigate the nature of the employment and training of young people in detail, however this brief overview of what is happening in a small sample of organisations shows how the NRA is either fitting in with recruitment and training procedures or being disregarded.

One relatively new initiative is the Skilliseekers scheme which is funded by the Local Enterprise Companies (LECs). At the end of the chapter some specific comments will be made about the Skillseekers scheme and the part the NRA is seen as playing within the scheme.

Our sample of training providers included those who select trainees on behalf of companies, and are therefore looking for specific aptitudes, and those who provide a general training for young people from a wide ability range, including those who did not cope well with school work.

Employers' and training providers' methods of selection

Application forms

A number of organisations have developed and honed application forms to suit their specific needs, and therefore have confidence in the information they provide. In comparison to application forms NRAs are owned by the young people who decide what information to include and how to present it. NRAs contain a lot more information than may be required on a company application form. This extra information may not be seen as relevant by the company with regard to recruitment for a specific post.

The following comments show some employers' and training providers' attitudes towards company application forms, compared with their attitude to the NRA.

- One employer said that the Job Centre provides applicants with the firm's application form. This form is very comprehensive and candidates are asked to provide three referees: two personal and one academic. Recruits are shortlisted on educational qualifications and certificates are seen at the interview. Experience and interests are discussed but NRAs are not requested and rarely presented.
- In the case of a second employer initial selection is made using the company application form which allows for easier comparisons to be made between candidates. This method of selection is seen as less time-consuming than 'ploughing' through a number of NRAs.
- A third employer said that the firm's application form allows for easier comparisons to be made between candidates in **different age groups**. It would be difficult to compare an NRA with an application form and may disadvantage an older worker with no NRA.
- Another employer asks for resumes to be sent which are short and to the point. The resume could indicate that an NRA is available, with more detailed information, which the employer can request.
- One training organisation has a well-planned selection procedure which does not involve the NRA. A 'personal specification' of the qualifications and other qualities the organisation is looking for is drawn up. When recruitment takes place about 600 applications are received. From this large group 300 people are selected for interview using the 'personal specification' and a scoring system. Out of the 300 people interviewed 70 will be selected for training.

- One training provider offered what seemed to be good advice on how the NRA might fit into the selection process for many employers; she suggested that young people should be trained to lift relevant information out of their NRAs to put on application forms.

The selection interview

Only one employer in our sample of employers and training providers is asking young people to send their NRAs to him prior to the interview. The majority are not requesting young people to bring their NRAs to interviews. In most cases, therefore, employers and training providers see the NRA only if the young person chooses to bring it.

Employers in particular place great emphasis on the face-to-face interview. They are looking for young people who will 'fit in' with the rest of the workforce and the firm's ethos. Employers use the interview to look for someone to suit their firm's needs while some training providers use it to look at the needs of the young person. Some training providers believe that several of the young people they accept for training would not be offered jobs by employers because they lack communication and other skills that employers require. They believe that skills training offers young people time to mature and build up self-esteem so that they will be able to cope with a job interview at a later date. With the skills and increased maturity gained in training these young people will also be able to add to their NRAs with increased confidence.

The following comments show some employers' and training providers' attitudes towards interviews, compared with their attitude towards the NRA.

Scepticism about using the NRA prior to the interview

By comparison with the NRA the interview is seen as a more satisfactory way of assessing young recruits.

- One employer said that he would not use the NRA to sift candidates prior to the interview because he is very sceptical about what appears in writing. He prefers to see a large number of candidates and relies on his interview technique to make the right choice. He said that those who appear to be the best candidates on paper do not always perform well in the interview.

The NRA is useful during the interview

The NRA process can improve a young person's self-awareness and confidence which will enhance his/her interview performance.

- One employer said that the NRA facilitates discussion in the interview. Young people can be given the opportunity to demonstrate their communication skills when they talk about the contents of their NRA. He stressed 'if they can communicate well, they can learn well'(and become a valuable employee).
- Compared to an application form the NRA can give a more comprehensive picture of an applicant. Sometimes young people are interviewed before they know their Standard Grade examination results. The NRA is useful at this stage, in not only supplying estimates of examination achievements, but also information about other achievements and experiences which will be of interest to an employer or training provider.

- One employer uses the NRA to find out about a young person's out of school interests. He feels that outside interests give an insight into a young person's character. If a pupil has given commitment to a paper round or the Scouts it is likely that they will prove to be a committed employee.
- Another employer agreed that the NRA gives the employer information that is not provided by other sources. This interviewee appreciated the 'great amount of detail' in the NRA, especially on school achievements.

Tests relevant to the job

Some employers and training providers test young people to see if they are suited to the work or training they have chosen. Group training centres undertake the initial selection of candidates for a group of companies in the same line of business, for example engineering or the motor trade.

The following comments show how employers and training providers value the tests by comparison with their attitude to the NRA.

- An employer said that group training centres are looking for young people who have the aptitude to be trained in the specific skills the companies are looking for. The training centre will put the young applicants through a battery of tests designed to assess these specific aptitudes. Those who pass the tests will be sent to individual companies for interviews.
- A training provider explained that recruitment for apprentice motor mechanics takes place prior to examination results being known. Aptitude tests form a major part of the selection procedure and will be of more importance in selection than any information contained in an NRA.

Preference for candidates with workplace skills

The following comments show how recruitment practices may operate against young people in some businesses and in favour of those who have experience.

- As training young people is expensive some employers choose to employ older people who are already trained. Other employers take on experienced staff on short-term contracts when the need arises.
- It was pointed out to us by some employers that older, experienced people do not have NRAs and so these interviewees could see no reason, at present, to obtain information about the NRA.
- One employer asks the Job Centre to send experienced women who do not need training. The employer used to have a training centre for young recruits but this was shut down.
- Another employer asks employment agencies to send experienced staff, on short-term contracts, to the firm. Inexperienced school leavers are not recruited.

■ Concerns expressed about the use of the NRA in recruitment

The following comments reveal that some employers have the perception that the NRA is not relevant to their needs in selecting employees.

Some employers who want to recruit young people with practical skills do not see the value of the NRA in recruitment (for example greenkeepers, dental laboratory owners, farmers and factory managers). They consider that an interview combined with good

connections with the local school and knowledge about a young person's family provide enough information.

- The manager of a small firm which obtains local people from well-known local families for fish processing work said he did not need the kind of information contained in an NRA.
- A second employer, whose business is situated in a small community, asks the young people to put their name down at the factory for both factory and office jobs. They are then interviewed. The background of these young people will be well-known.

Other comments reveal that employers sometimes doubt whether the NRA is a true reflection of a young person's ability.

- One employer said that the communication skills of most of the applicants for an office job did not reflect the skills laid down in their NRAs. This employer said he had become disillusioned with the NRA as an accurate indication of ability.
- The second employer said that he had not found the NRA to be a true reflection of young people's abilities or interests. He said, 'When questioned about their supposed interests, they hadn't a clue'.This employer suspects that the teacher or the parents were filling in the NRA.

The interviewees' poor performance could be the result of poor interview preparation rather than lack of ability. Unfortunately this lack of preparation may lead the employer to doubt the accuracy of the information in the young peoples' NRAs. It would seem to be advisable to combine production of the NRA with interview practice in school.

This is not such a problem with training providers as the following comment illustrates.

- A poorly completed NRA should not act against a young person when they come to a training organisation. Attendance, motivation and maturity have all been shown to improve when a young person leaves school for training.

■ Use of the NRA in relation to the Skillseekers initiative

The Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) fund the Skillseekers scheme and reach agreements with employers and training providers on the delivery of the Skillseekers programme. The main thrust of the Skillseekers scheme is to enable young people to obtain SVQs. The emphasis is on the Personal Training Plan which lays down what must be done in order for the young person to achieve the SVQs of their choice.

Representatives of three Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) were interviewed over the telephone. One interviewee described the relationship of his LEC with training providers and employers with regard to the Skillseekers initiative.

- Under the Skillseekers scheme the training provider will train young people in their chosen vocational qualifications. This qualification will enhance their future employment prospects. The training provider might be able to help the young person seek employment after they have finished their course of training.
- If a young person is taken on by an employer under the Skillseekers scheme, the LEC will pay for the college training in the relevant vocational qualifications. On completion of training the young person would be likely to continue in employment.

When asked about the use of the NRA another interviewee said that the LEC suggests but does not insist that employers and training providers recruiting for Skillseekers should ask for the NRA. The other two LEC representatives said that their companies put no pressure on employers and training providers to use the NRA.

The following comments show a mixed picture of the use of the NRA within the Skillseekers scheme.

- One training provider said that candidates for the Skillseekers scheme rarely present NRAs at the interview. He said he had not received any NRAs from the LEC. However, training plans are developed for young people on the scheme but these are LEC documents and are not part of the NRA.
- Another training provider said that few applicants for the Skillseekers scheme present the NRA at the interview. He issues the young people with an NRA if they do not have one. The NRA is then used throughout training.
- One employer said that NRAs are presented at the interview infrequently by young people. An action plan is drawn up for the young person once he/she has been recruited. The LEC representative is assigned to the company to develop an action plan with the company on behalf of the school leaver. The action plan refers to the nature of further education the school leaver will need in order to obtain the relevant SVQs. The NRA is not seen by the employer once the young person has been recruited and begins training. The NRA is the young person's document, the action plan replaces the NRA.

■ Summary

This is a summary of the current attitudes of the employers and training providers in our sample who chose to make informal comments about their recruitment procedures. Lack of awareness and understanding of the NRA was reflected in a number of the comments.

- The employers in our sample all relied more upon their own application form than upon the NRA. Two employers and one training provider indicated that the NRA provided too much information for an interviewer. It was suggested that relevant information from the NRA could be selected and put on the application form or a short resume.
- The employers in our sample all relied more upon interviewing applicants than upon the NRA. Two employers expressed disappointment with the interview performance of young people who presented high quality NRAs. They therefore felt that the NRA was not reliable as a record of communication skills.
- Some employers who recruit local young people, for jobs requiring practical aptitude, currently do not see the value of the NRA in recruitment.
- Some employers prefer to employ older workers with prior experience. Most of these do not have NRAs.
- There appears to be no co-ordinated use of the NRA within the Skillseekers initiative. The LECs do not see it as their responsibility to promote the NRA, although some do informally.

9 Survey of Further and Higher Education Institutions

The NRA is promoted to youngsters as a lifelong document that should be continually updated and as a resource that they can use to help them to make transitions in their lives between school, employment, training and further and higher education. It was important, therefore, to survey institutions of further and higher education to find out how widely the NRA was being used by them in the selection of students. It was also important to find out how widely the NRA was being used in this sector as a tool for student development, while acknowledging that institutions have only recently started to use the NRA in this way.

A questionnaire was sent to the admissions officer in every institution of further and higher education in Scotland. The questionnaire asked about the institutions' use of the NRA in selection, about their use of it in student development and about their communication with other bodies using the NRA.

The sample

All further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions in Scotland were contacted and asked to complete a survey questionnaire in June 1995. The actual number of FE and HE institutions contacted and the number of questionnaires returned are shown in Table 9.1. The HE institutions included universities and specialist higher education institutions. The FE institutions included all FE colleges and (in the northern islands) FE units.

Table 9.1: Responses to the survey of further and higher education

	Questionnaires sent out	*Questionnaires returned*	*Response rate*
FE	46	34	74%
HE	23	18	78%
Total	69	52	75%

Although the questionnaire was addressed to the admissions officer in each institution, Figure 9.2 shows that questionnaires had been completed by members of staff in various different positions.

Table 9.2: Member of staff who completed the questionnaire (total = 52)

	No of questionnaires completed by a person in this position
Registrar/Admissions Officer	22
Principal/Assistant Principal	11
Student Services staff	6
Guidance/welfare staff	6
Teaching staff	5
Other	2

How widely is the NRA being used in selection?

Institutions were asked whether they were using the NRA in selection and, if so, how useful they found it and also how confident they felt in the information given by it. Those institutions that were not using it were asked to give their reasons. Institutions were also asked to indicate which other sources of information they used in selection.

Use of the NRA in selection

Overall more of the FE colleges said they were using the NRA in selection than the HE institutions. Of the 34 FE colleges responding, 24 indicated that they were using the NRA while only 4 of the 18 HE institutions said they were using it. Figure 9.1 shows the relative percentages for these figures. These percentages are larger than those reported in *School for Skills* (SCRE, 1994). In the research carried out for *School for Skills*, approximately 6% of the HE institutions surveyed and about 30% of the FE colleges said they were using either the NRA or an RoA frequently in selection.

Institutions that were using the NRA in selection were asked how useful they found it as a source of information. Most of the institutions that were using it said they found it 'quite useful' or 'very useful' with only a few FE colleges indicating that they did not find it very useful. These responses are represented in Figure 9.2.

The institutions using the NRA in selection generally seemed to be confident in the information given by the NRA. Figure 9.3 shows that most were at least fairly confident in the NRA as a source of information and some indicated that they were very confident in it.

Figure 9.1: Institutions using the NRA in selection

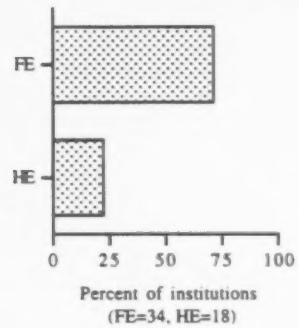


Figure 9.2: Usefulness of the NRA to institutions using it in selection

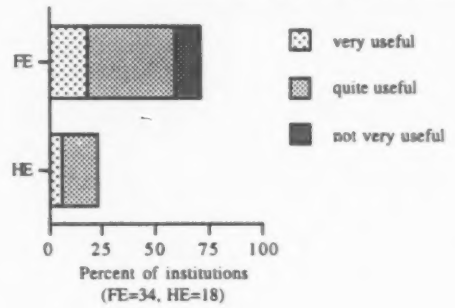
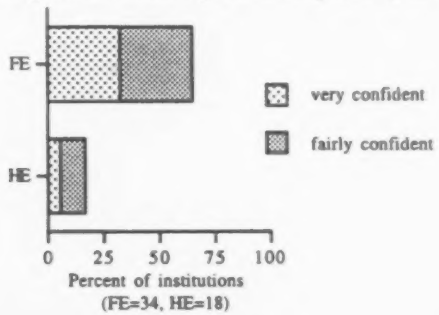


Figure 9.3: Confidence in the information given by the NRA



Reasons for not using the NRA and plans for future use

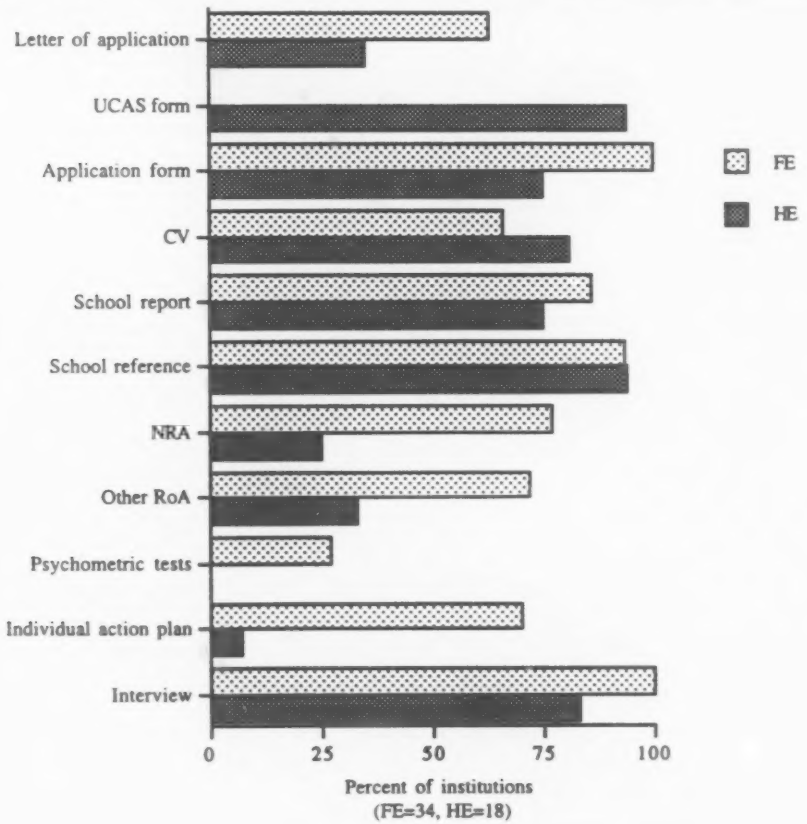
Nineteen institutions (12 HE, 7 FE) indicated that they were not using the NRA in selection (28 said that they were and 5 did not answer the question, making a total of 52). They mostly gave the reason that they preferred to use an alternative selection method such as an application form or a reference or report. Of those institutions that were not currently using the NRA in selection, none of the HE institutions and only 3 of the FE colleges had definite plans to introduce it as a selection aid in the future.

Other sources of information used in selection

FE and HE institutions were using a wide variety of information to help them in selecting students. Their use of other sources of information is shown in Figure 9.4. Use of the NRA has also been included in the graph to enable comparison. Almost all the HE institutions were using the UCAS form and all FE colleges were using an application form to help them to select students. School references and reports were being widely used in FE and HE. Interviews were being used by most FE colleges and the large majority of HE institutions. CVs were also popular sources of information, more so in HE than in FE. Individual action plans were being used by many of the FE colleges but very few of the HE institutions.

Only 3 of the FE colleges and one of the HE institutions had been using another kind of RoA to help them to select young people before the launch of the NRA in February 1991.

Figure 9.4: Sources of information used by institutions in selecting students



Use of the NRA in selection and views of it as a selection tool

The 24 FE colleges and the 4 HE institutions that said they were using the NRA in selection were asked a series of questions about their actual use of it and their views of it as a selection tool. This section refers only to this group of 28 institutions. They were asked to refer specifically to the NRA in their answers and not to any RoAs that they may be using or may have used in the past.

Use of the NRA in selection

Only one institution (FE) had a written policy on the use of the NRA in selection. Only 10 (all FE) of the 28 institutions were actually asking for applicants' NRAs in the course of selection. All others were using NRAs only when applicants sent them in with application forms or brought them to interviews unsolicited.

None of the institutions asked for NRAs to be sent when applicants were first applying for places on courses. A small number of the institutions (5 FE, 3 HE) said that a few of their applicants had sent their NRAs in the early stages of applying without being asked. Those applicants who did send their NRAs tended to send the entire folder rather than selected pages.

None of the HE institutions asked applicants to bring their NRAs to interview, but just under half of the FE colleges (10) did. The majority of institutions (12 FE, 4 HE) said that a few of their applicants brought their NRAs to interview without being asked and a further six (FE) said that half or more of their applicants brought their NRAs to interview without being asked. When asked how they were actually using NRAs in interviews, most of the institutions said that they used the NRA as a basis for discussion, that they picked out particular points of interest or that they let the young person use it or refer to it. Fewer institutions said that they used it as a basis for interview questions.

All pages of the NRA seemed to be helpful to institutions that were using the NRA in selection both before the interview stage and during an interview.

Views of the NRA as a tool for selection

The NRA was viewed as presenting a good overall picture of an applicant by 21 of the 28 institutions (17 FE, 4 HE) using it in selection. Only one respondent (FE) said they thought it presented a poor overall picture of an applicant (6 did not answer the question).

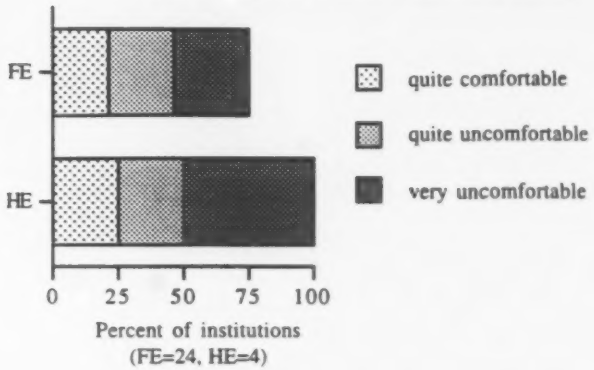
The majority of respondents thought that the NRA was filled in by teachers and pupils together (17 FE, 3 HE). Only 2 respondents (1 FE, 1 HE) thought it was filled in by pupils alone.

When asked whether the NRA provided any useful extra information that they would not get in any other way, most respondents answered 'no' or missed the question out (14 FE, 3 HE). Some of the answers given by the remaining respondents were: the individual action plan (2 FE, 1 HE), the attendance rate (2 FE), information on an applicant's hobbies and interests (2 FE) and information on an applicant's personal strengths (1 FE).

The majority of respondents (13 FE, 3 HE) said they would be quite uncomfortable or very uncomfortable using the NRA as the sole means of selecting students replacing other existing procedures. Six respondents (5 FE, 1 HE) said they would be quite comfortable doing this (the remaining 6 respondents did not answer the question). Figure 9.5 illustrates these figures. When asked to give reasons for their answers the most popular answer (10

FE, 1 HE) was that they thought face-to-face contact with an applicant was important or necessary in selection and that the NRA could not replace this.

Figure 9.5: How comfortable institutions would be about using the NRA as the sole means of selecting students



When asked to state what they saw as the problems or obstacles associated with the use of the NRA in selection, respondents gave a variety of answers which are detailed in Table 9.3. Five respondents said that it was too large or time-consuming, and almost as many (4) said they saw no problems with using it. A few respondents said that selectors in institutions were generally not aware of the NRA or that its credibility was low amongst selectors. Some respondents said they doubted whether the NRA was always a pupil's own work.

Table 9.3: The problems and obstacles associated with using the NRA in selection (FE=24, HE=4)

	No of FE respondents mentioning this problem	*No of HE respondents mentioning this problem*	*Total no of respondents**
Too large or time-consuming	4	1	5
It may not be the pupils own work	3	0	3
It has low credibility amongst selectors/selectors are not aware of it	2	1	3
It's too general/not specific enough to courses applied for	1	2	3
Few NRAs are available	1	0	1
Safekeeping/storage before interview	1	1	2
No problems with it	4	0	4
Other	4	1	5

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one problem.

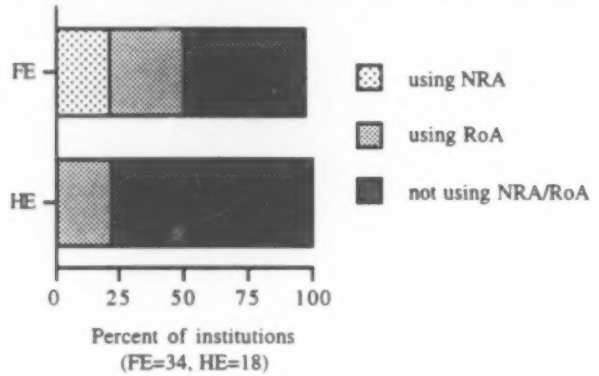
Use of records of achievement with students

All institutions were asked whether they were using the NRA or an alternative record of achievement (RoA) with their existing students to encourage them to summarise their individual achievements or to help them in planning their own development throughout the course and beyond. Those institutions that were using the NRA or an alternative were asked a series of more detailed questions about their use of it and their views of it.

Use of the NRA or an alternative

Only 7 (all FE) of the 52 institutions were using the NRA with their enrolled students, 14 were using another kind of RoA (10 FE, 4 HE) and 30 were not using a record of achievement (16 HE, 14 FE, one did not answer the question). These findings are displayed in Figure 9.6. These findings are broadly similar to those from the research carried out for *School for Skills*. In the *School for Skills* study, about the same number of FE colleges and no HE institutions claimed that their students were adding to their NRAs or RoAs while continuing their education.

Figure 9.6: Institutions using the NRA or an alternative with their students



Of the 30 institutions that were not using a record of achievement with their students, 5 had definite plans to introduce the NRA in the future (4 FE, 1 HE) and one had definite plans to introduce an alternative (HE). They were asked to give their reasons for not using a record of achievement with their students at that time. Eight respondents gave the reason that they used another method and six gave the reason that few students have NRAs. A few respondents mentioned other reasons which are detailed in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4: Reasons for not using a record of achievement with enrolled students (14 FE, 16 HE)

	No of FE respondents giving this reason	*No of HE respondents giving this reason*	*Total no of respondents**
Use another method	3	5	8
Few students have NRAs	6	0	6
NRA not been considered by the institution/not policy	0	3	3
Too time-consuming/requires too many resources	0	3	3
Planning to use/under consideration	1	1	2
Not a current priority	1	0	1
Piloted and found unpopular	0	1	1
Too many externally imposed systems	1	0	1
Other	3	2	5

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one reason.

Institutions using the NRA

Institutions that were using the NRA or an alternative with their students were asked a series of more detailed questions about their actual use of it and about their views of it. This section focuses on the 7 FE colleges that were using the NRA. Those institutions that were using an alternative will be dealt with separately.

Use of the NRA

Five of the colleges had one person in the college who had responsibility for NRA-related activities. Only 1 out of the 7 institutions, however, had a written policy on the use of the NRA with their students.

Institutions were asked what proportion of their students were using the NRA. All 7 institutions said that half or fewer of their students were using it at the time of the questionnaire. All 7 institutions said that the process their students went through in producing their NRAs involved a cycle of action planning activities (ie reviewing achievements, setting goals, devising targets, drawing up an action plan and then repeating the process). Institutions were providing various different types of support to help their students with this process (Table 9.5). All provided the support of a tutor, some provided other kinds of support as well, such as time allocated in the timetable for NRA work or access to computer facilities. Almost all institutions provided the support of a tutor to students when they were producing the NRA document, some also provided computer facilities, support materials or typing to help with this (Table 9.6).

Table 9.5: Support provided by institutions to help with the NRA process (FE=7)

	*No of institutions providing this**
Support of tutor	7
Time allocated in timeetable	2
Personal interviews	1
Computer facilities	1
Tutorials/work in groups	1
Support materials	1

*Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support.

Table 9.6: Support provided by institutions to help with the production of the NRA document (FE=7)

	*No of institutions providing this**
Support of tutor	6
Computer facilities	3
Support materials	1
Typing	1

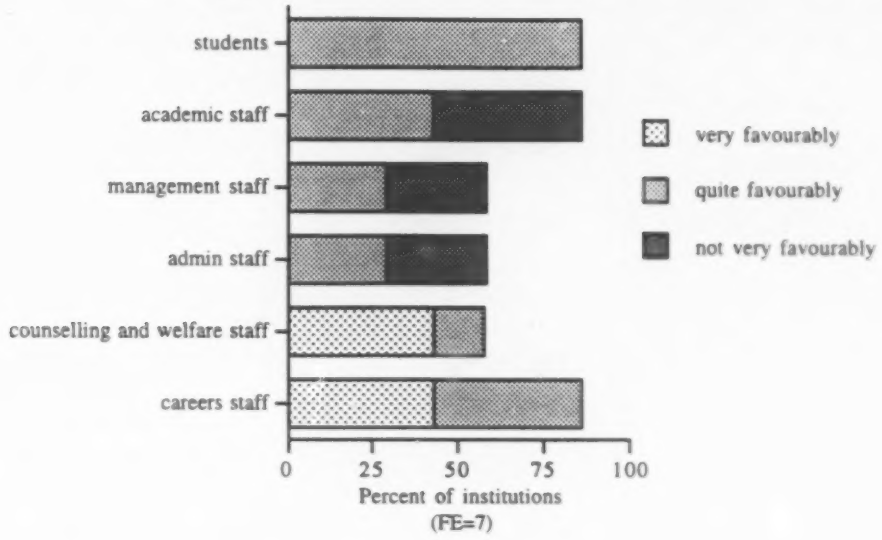
*Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support.

Views of the NRA

Respondents were asked for their impressions of how they thought different groups had reacted to the introduction of the NRA. Figure 9.7 shows that they thought the reactions

of students had been quite favourable. Academic, management and administrative staff had either reacted not very favourably or quite favourably. The reactions of counselling, welfare and careers staff had been quite favourable or very favourable.

Figure 9.7: Reactions of different groups to the introduction of the NRA (FE=7)
(institutions not represented did not answer the question)



Respondents were asked what they saw as the benefits of the NRA. Several mentioned that it was a continuous record of a young person's progress and a couple mentioned that it was a complete record of a young person's achievements and experiences. Various other benefits were mentioned and these are shown in Table 9.7.

Table 9.7: Benefits of the NRA (FE=7)

	*No of respondents mentioning this benefit**
A continuous record	3
A complete record of achievements/experiences	2
Raises self awareness	1
Compact/concise	1
Recognition of achievements in and outside college/school	1
Students more pro-active in own learning	1
Process of review/reflection	1
Standard to all	1
Students take pride in the document	1

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one benefit.

Respondents were asked what they saw as the obstacles to and the problems associated with a full implementation of the NRA with all students. The answers given are detailed in Table 9.8. Most respondents mentioned problems of resourcing such as staff time or finance.

Table 9.8: Problems with a full implementation of the NRA with all students (FE=7)

	*No of respondents mentioning this**
Extra staff time required	3
Finance	2
Admin time	1
Attitudes of staff: convincing them of the benefits	1
Resources	1
Other	1

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one problem.

When asked what support would help with these problems, most respondents also mentioned resources: hardware or software, finance and time (Table 9.9).

Table 9.9: Support that would help with these problems (FE=7)

	*No of respondents mentioning this**
Hardware/software	2
Finance	1
Time	1
Senior management commitment	1
Resources	1
Other	1

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support.

Institutions using an alternative RoA

Fourteen institutions said they were using an alternative RoA (10 FE, 4 HE). Although this goes against the concept of the NRA as a continuing activity/process/product that individuals carry with them throughout their lives, we have taken the view that the research should cover these alternatives. This section will focus on these institutions. Table 9.10 shows the alternative RoAs that institutions said they were using.

It is interesting to see how differently institutions have understood the term 'record of achievement'. Some of the 'RoAs' listed differ widely in terms of the extent to which a student owns the record and the extent to which he or she contributes to its production.

Six of the institutions (all FE) said that their students went through an action planning process in order to produce their RoAs. The RoAs which involve action planning have been asterisked in Table 9.10.

Table 9.10: Alternative RoAs used by institutions (FE=10, HE=4) (1 did not answer)

	*No of institutions using this RoA**
SCOTVEC RET	3
Transcript	2
RoA	2*
Action planning and progress review sheet	1*
College student record	1
Individual action plan	1*
CSCAMP	1*
Professional report (COSHEP)	1
Learner agreement	1*

* RoA involves action planning.

Use of the RoA

The 14 institutions using an alternative RoA were asked why they were using this RoA rather than the NRA. The reasons given are detailed in Table 9.11.

Table 9.11: Reasons for using an RoA other than the NRA (FE=10, HE=4) (1 did not answer)

	No of respondents
Appropriate to student needs	4
Been using this for some time	3
Easily understood by students/employers and has credibility amongst employers	2
Provides details of course and grades	1
Standard procedure	1
Computerised system	1
Working agreement with funders	1

Two institutions (1 FE, 1 HE) had written policies on the use of the RoA and 6 (5 FE, 1 HE) had a member of staff with responsibility for RoA-related activities in the institution.

The institutions were providing various types of support to students to help them with the RoA process and with the production of the RoA document. These are detailed in Tables 9.12 and 9.13. Almost all of the responses shown in Tables 9.12 and 9.13 were given by the 6 institutions whose RoA process involved action planning. This suggests perhaps that students studying at institutions that were not doing action planning were less involved in the process and production of their RoAs.

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Table 9.12: Support provided by institutions to help with the RoA process (FE=10, HE=4)

	*No of institutions providing this**
Support of tutor	6
Tutorials/work in groups	3
Personal interviews	2
SCOTVEC/Registry produce RoA	2
Induction programme	1
Careers advice	1

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support

Table 9.13: Support provided by institutions to help with the production of the RoA document (FE=10, HE=4)

	*No of institutions providing this**
Support of tutor	3
Computer facilities	2
Interviews	2
Induction programme	1
Tutorials/work in groups	1
Computer printout	1
Reference	1
Resources	1

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support

Views of the RoA

Respondents were asked what they saw as the benefits of the RoA. Several mentioned that the RoA recorded and recognised achievements in and outside of school or college. Others said that it was a complete record of all achievements and experiences. Various other benefits were mentioned which are detailed in Table 9.14.

Table 9.14: Benefits of the RoA (FE=10, HE=4)

	No of FE respondents	*No of HE respondents*	*Total no of respondents**
Recognition of achievements in and outside of college/school	4	0	4
A complete record of achievements/ experiences	2	1	3
Validated record	2	0	2
Easily understood	1	1	2
A continuous record	1	0	1
Compact/concise	1	0	1
Systematic	0	1	1
Students take pride in the document	1	0	1
Process of review/reflection	1	0	1
Students more pro-active in own learning	1	0	1
Other	2	1	3

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one benefit.

Respondents were asked what they saw as the obstacles to and the problems associated with a full implementation of the RoA with all students. Several mentioned that staff time was a problem. Others said that students did not have time and some said that staff would need to be convinced of the benefits of it. The other answers given are detailed in Table 9.15. Table 9.16 shows the kinds of support that respondents thought would help.

Table 9.15: Problems with a full implementation of the RoA with all students (FE=10, HE=4)

	*No of respondents mentioning this**
Extra staff time required	5
Attitudes of staff	2
Student time	2
Staff development	1
Resources	1
Attitudes of students	1
Other	3

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one problem.

Table 9.16: Support that would help with these problems (FE=10, HE=4)

	*No of respondents mentioning this**
Time	3
Admin back-up	2
Hardware/software	2
Training for staff	1
Finance	1
Publicising benefits of RoA	1
Other	4

* Respondents may have mentioned more than one type of support.

Communication with other bodies using the NRA

The NRA is promoted to young people as a tool that they can use to help them make transitions in their lives between school, employment, study and training. It was important, therefore, to find out whether any further and higher education institutions had been contacted by schools or had themselves contacted other users of the NRA in order to promote its use or to ask for feedback on the NRA.

Communication with schools about the NRA

The 28 institutions (24 FE, 4 HE) that were using the NRA in selection were asked whether any schools had liaised with them in order to promote the NRA to them as an aid to selection. Only 6 of the institutions (all FE) said that this had happened. Only 1 institution (FE) had been given the opportunity to give any feedback to schools about how useful the NRA was to them or on how it might be made more useful to them in selection.

Communication with other users of the NRA

The 21 institutions (17 FE, 4 HE) that were using the NRA or another RoA with their students in student development were asked whether they had liaised with any employers, training organisations or other institutions of further and higher education in order to promote the NRA/RoA to them as a selection tool or to receive feedback from them on the NRA/RoA that they were helping their students to produce. Figures 9.8 and 9.9 show that very few institutions had liaised with any employers, training organisations or other institutions of further and higher education for promotion or feedback on the NRA/RoA.

Figure 9.8: Institutions which had liaised with other users to promote the NRA/RoA to them as a selection tool

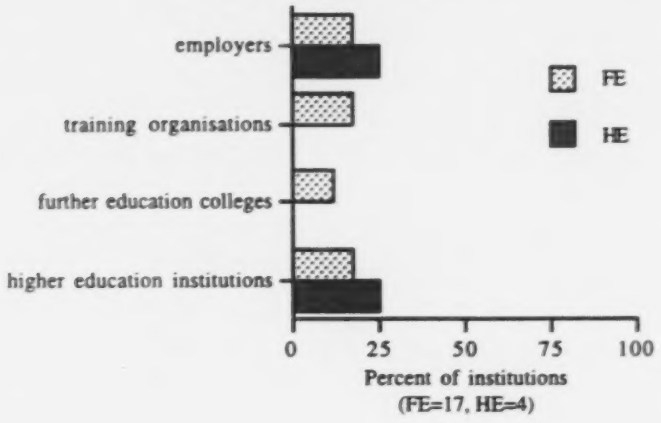
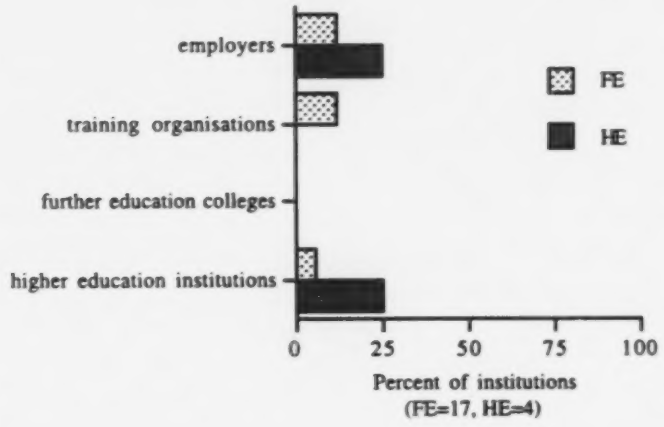


Figure 9.9: Institutions which had liaised with other users to receive feedback on the NRA/RoA they were using with their students



Final comments

All 52 respondents were asked if they would like to make any other comments on the NRA or on records of achievement in general. Twenty respondents made comments. Two used this space to clarify some of their answers on the questionnaire, 7 made positive comments on the NRA and 11 mentioned problems with the NRA or reservations about its use.

Summary

- 28 of the 52 institutions responding to the questionnaire were using the NRA in the selection of students. Most of these (24) were FE colleges.
- Only 10 (all FE) of the institutions using the NRA in selection were actually asking applicants to bring their NRAs to interview. None of the other institutions were asking applicants for their NRAs, but were using them in selection when applicants brought them to interview or sent them in with applications unsolicited.
- Those not using the NRA in selection mostly gave the reason that they preferred to use an alternative method such as an application form or a reference or report.
- The majority of respondents who were using the NRA in selection thought it presented a good overall picture of an applicant but most said they would be uncomfortable about using it as the sole means of selecting applicants replacing other selection methods.
- 7 institutions were using the NRA with their enrolled students. All of these were FE colleges. 14 other institutions said they were using alternative 'RoAs'. 6 of these and all of the institutions using the NRA were doing action planning with their students as part of the process.
- Those institutions not using a record of achievement with their students gave various different reasons for this including that they preferred to use another method, that few students had NRAs, that it was not institutional policy or that it was too time-consuming.
- Students appeared to have reacted quite favourably to the introduction of the NRA in the 7 institutions that were using the NRA in student development. About half or fewer than half of the students in these institutions were actually using the NRA.
- A lack of resources (time and finance) was cited as the main obstacle to a full implementation of the NRA with all students.
- Very few institutions had been contacted by schools or had themselves contacted other users of the NRA in order to promote its use or to ask for feedback on it.

10 Case-Studies of Schools

It is important that the evaluation of the NRA should take into account the problems which need to be addressed by those responsible for transferring the vision of policy-makers into actual practice in schools, colleges, universities and employment. The context of use always shapes the implementation of an innovation. The new must build constructively upon what is already in place. There will inevitably be constraints in terms of time and money. This means that those responsible for leading and managing the NRA in a particular institution must use their judgement in making a number of decisions which involve trade-off and compromise.

We, therefore, visited four schools and interviewed staff and pupils as well as collecting all relevant documentation and talking at length to the key member of staff responsible for the NRA.

The schools were chosen from a total of 16 recommended by regional authority staff or training institutions as sites of good practice. Each school was telephoned and asked for further information about their use of the NRA. They were also asked if they would be willing to be visited by the evaluators. The four schools were chosen as far as possible to provide a range of different approaches and different geographical locations. However, to reduce the level of demand on any one school, we decided, following our telephone enquiry, not to select any school which had already been visited in a previous small-scale HMI evaluation of the NRA.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into five sections. In the first four we present brief case-studies of the way that the NRA is being used in each school. In the final section we summarise the main points arising from these case-studies together with an analysis of, and commentary upon, the main issues which arise from them.

The purpose of these case-studies is to enable readers to understand the complex issues which schools have to address in implementing the NRA. They should be read as essential supplements to the survey. They are intended to embed the large quantity of information from the surveys in descriptions of actual practice in schools. They should not be read as accounts of good practice. The whole issue of what constitutes good practice and criteria for judging good practice in the NRA will be addressed in chapter 11.

We were impressed by the commitment and effort that each of the four schools was putting into the NRA, and would like to thank staff of the schools for giving of their time so generously and enabling us to reach a deeper understanding of the NRA in practice.

Schools were visited for one day each by one or two researchers. Before each visit, a letter was sent to the school explaining that during our visit we were interested in speaking to the key member of staff with responsibility for the NRA, to any other members of staff who were involved in the development or delivery of NRA-related activities in the school and to small groups of pupils from each year group. It was then left to the school to decide who would speak to us during our visit. This is why the numbers of staff and pupils we spoke to in each school varied.

Much information was gathered on each school's use of the NRA through interviews with staff and pupils, through collecting relevant documentation and also through the information given by schools on the survey questionnaire. In each of the following, a description of practice in the school is followed by the views of staff and pupils. Each case-study description contains the same sections but the amount of information in sections varies from school to school. This should not be seen as significant in itself. The descriptions represent the information that schools gave us during our visits and are not necessarily comprehensive in themselves.

School A

Introduction and history of NRA in the school

School A has 1100 pupils and is located in a small town in an area of high unemployment.

The TVEI Extension Project in the region has provided the stimulus for the development of NRA in the region's secondary schools. The school has received teacher time equivalent to 0.8 of a full-time teacher (0.5 FTE senior management team and 0.3 FTE guidance team) through TVEI with the principle purpose of enabling the management and delivery of the project entitlements including the process of review and target setting leading to the NRA. The TVEI Extension Project has also provided a locus for the development of materials and approaches supportive of the delivery of NRA.

The NRA was first introduced into the school in 1991. The staff were aware that it was possible to focus on the production of the NRA document in isolation but they decided, with the region's encouragement, to aim to produce the NRA through a process whereby the pupils reflected on their own progress and took steps to organise their own time and plan ahead.

The school had been involved in the regional TVEI model for subject profiling in its first year (1991-1992). The aim of the model was to introduce a system of profiling into all subjects whereby pupils assessed their own strengths and weaknesses in each subject and negotiated targets for improvement with their teachers. The school was unable to make teachers' participation in profiling mandatory because the teaching unions were opposed to any increase in workload at that time. The system was, therefore, based on the voluntary participation of teachers which, in practice, meant that profiling was only being carried out in about one-third of subjects. In the second year of operation the same teaching staff did not volunteer again which meant that there was no continuity for the pupils involved in the scheme. The staff quickly decided that subject profiling was unworkable but thought they could use a variation of it as part of the NRA process.

The staff decided to base the NRA process in the school on a system of profiling and on the use of a student planner. Because profiling in subjects had proved unworkable, they decided to introduce a profiling exercise into Social Education which focused on pupils' strengths and weaknesses more generally, on their progress in all their subjects and which encouraged them to set targets for improvement in identified areas of weakness. The planner was introduced in order to encourage students to record their achievements, organise their own time and plan ahead. The assistant rector (whose position is funded by TVEI) persuaded TVEI to fund and pilot the use of a planner in 10 schools in the region. It was hoped that subject teachers would become involved in the NRA process by encouraging pupils to organise their homework and to start to set short-term targets using the planner.

The process

The process leading to the production of an NRA in the school at the moment is still based on profiling in Social Education and the use of a student planner. The planner, profiling process and method of production of the NRA are described in detail below and summarised in Table 10.1.

The planner

The student planner is given out to all pupils in years S3-S5. A basic planner is bought in by the school and customised. For a detailed list of the contents of the planner see Table 10.2. The introduction to the planner mentions the NRA, telling pupils that the information recorded in it will be vital for completing their NRAs when they leave school.

The planner is introduced to pupils during two periods of Social Education in S3. Its uses are described and pupils are encouraged to use it to manage their time, record their achievements and plan their work. They are encouraged to use it to organise and record all their activities including interests outside of school and social events.

Use of the planner is the student's own responsibility. A recent school survey showed that only 15% of pupils seemed to be discarding it. The remaining 85% still had their planners after one year. At the moment subject teacher involvement is on a voluntary basis and varies greatly. Some teachers never mention the planner, others tell students to get it out once a week and consider the week ahead.

Pupils in S1 and S2 receive a small notebook to use as a homework diary. Pupils are encouraged to use it to record and plan their homework assignments. As with the planner it is the young person's own responsibility to use it, but register teachers do check them occasionally. It is hoped that the homework diary will provide an introduction to the idea of planning ahead and time management.

Table 10.1: School A: NRA process and production

Year	*Activity*
S1/S2	• Each pupil given a small notebook to be used as a homework diary
S3	• Planner first introduced in Social Education • Profiling pack worked through, strengths and weaknesses identified and targets set
S4	• New planner given out • First draft of profile produced • Oct/Nov: work experience placement undertaken, reviewed and written up • Feb: each pupil interviewed by guidance teacher • Personal statement and achievements and experiences pages written by pupil • Personal details, qualifications and credits, attendance rate produced by admin staff using SCAMP and personal statement, employment history and achievements and experiences typed up
S5	• New planner given out • Time allocated for updating NRA
Leavers	• NRA word processed by a member of the administrative staff

Profiling

During the two periods of Social Education in S3 in which the student planner is first introduced to pupils, they are also given their first profiling pack to work through. Using the pack, pupils assess their own strengths and weaknesses and, with the help of their teacher, identify target areas that they would like to develop. They are encouraged to set specific and realistic targets and lots of suggestions are provided in the pack eg 'Over the next few weeks I will hand homework in on time', 'Over the next few weeks I will organise myself so that I have all the books and equipment I need for each day at school'. At the end of the pack there is some information on how to use the planner and an example of its use. In the example, tasks to be done each day are noted down, including social events and extra-curricular activities, the weeks achievements are recorded ('picked for netball team, English essay grade 2') and a target for the next week is set ('I was late two times this week. I'll make sure I'm not late at all next week').

Table 10.2: The student planner

Basic contents	• Homework timetable
	• Personal attendance record
	• Monthly calendar
	• Homework diary and weekly planner
	• Blank pages for notes
Added by school	• Introduction to the planner
	• Description of study skills
	• Description of profiling and target setting
	• Space to record three personal targets
	• General information for students

At the start of S4, students begin to produce a profile. This forms an important part of the NRA process. Two periods are spent working through a profiling pack with the aim of producing a complete picture of their achievements, strengths and progress. Pupils are told that the profile will be used to create an NRA when they leave school. The notion of personal effectiveness is introduced in the pack in terms of task management skills and interpersonal skills. With this in mind, pupils are asked to review their S3 targets and consider setting new ones if this seems appropriate. Pupils review their academic achievements and identify their best and worst subjects. They set two targets which should lead to improvement in their worst subject. Any of the targets they have set are then copied into their S4 planners. Finally, there is space in the pack to record part-time employment and any activities that they take part in outside of school. The completed profile is then kept by the guidance teacher.

In October or November of S4 every pupil does a work experience placement lasting one week. They then complete a work experience review. This is stored together with an employer's report with the profile. In the review they identify what they enjoyed and did not enjoy, what tasks they actually did and how they benefited from the experience. They also write a personal statement evaluating what they gained from the experience.

In February of S4 they now have the skeleton of an NRA. They each have an interview with their guidance teacher and then write a personal statement and a summary of their achievements and experiences.

If pupils stay on in S5, they are again encouraged to review their targets and set new ones. They are given time to update information in the profile, personal statement and achievements and experiences where necessary.

Pupils in S3, S5 and S6 spend approximately 10 hours on the NRA-related activities described above in an academic year, while pupils in S4 spend approximately 18 hours on them.

Production of the NRA

The NRA is finally produced by a member of the administrative staff who is paid to work additional hours using software produced by the region's TVEI Project. Computer records (SCAMP) are used to produce the following pages

- personal details
- school achievements
- qualification and credits
- attendance rate.

The NRA is finalised in February or March and is available for printing if necessary. It is only actually printed out for leavers. The school decided to use administrative staff to produce the summative documents because it is more straightforward and the documents look more professional.

Liaison with external users

TVEI careers officers give promotional leaflets about NRA to organisations involved in providing work experience placements. The school staff promote its use informally whenever they can. The impression of the staff interviewed is that although some larger employers are starting to use it in selection the majority of organisations, including the smaller ones are not aware of the NRA. This is a concern.

> *We are conscious that we are giving this to these youngsters and telling them it's something of worth ... and they might take it and in a situation where they feel vulnerable anyway and under pressure they might get a knockback on it. We are looking at how we can support them to say 'I've got this and I think you should have a look at it.'*

Some colleges have asked for NRA and UCAS now ask applicants to indicate on their application form whether they have an NRA.

Plans for the future

Some changes will be made in the provision of NRA in the school in the near future. In 1995-1996 Social Education will be taken by guidance staff and this will mean that pupils will be reminded at least once a week to use their planners.

The provision of NRA for pupils with special educational needs will have to be considered as a small number of these pupils will be joining the school next session. A lot of support for this is currently available centrally through TVEI.

There is a move to introduce the careers action plan (CAP) into the NRA process. Each pupil would have an interview with a careers officer. The CAP would be produced by the careers officer and signed by the pupil. The pupil would then write their own long-term action plan based on the CAP.

At present, the NRA process begins in S3. There are plans to introduce activities more directly related to the NRA in S1 and S2.

With the end of TVEI in June 1996, the school will have to find other sources of funding to provide guidance staff cover and administrative staff overtime. It will also need to find time for the NRA co-ordinator and funding for the planner. The staff are currently looking at ways to reduce the cost of the planner and are considering selling space in it to advertisers. Even with the end of TVEI, the school is committed to the continuation of NRA.

> *We're looking to get a model here of how we can sustain this within the resources of the school.*

Staff views of NRA

The following views are based on a joint interview with a member of the guidance team and the assistant rector (TVEI), who has responsibility for co-ordinating NRA in the school.

Positive comments

It was clear that they were totally committed to the aims of NRA and saw it as being beneficial for the pupils.

> *For me it's a rite of passage. I would have a record of achievement giving-out day before I'd have a prize-giving any day.*

> *They're leaving school with something - a record of their achievement - it's not their fault if they don't have the ability to get a dux prize.*

> *It's good to see these kids able to write something positive about their educational experience ... it's good that they can say 'I did get this craft and design thing finished on time and I got a good grade for it.'*

One by-product of the NRA process is that more quality time is being spent with each pupil. Guidance staff are no longer only seeing the youngsters with problems.

> *The greatest benefit of TVEI in this school has been that because of the extra guidance staffing it is possible for each pupil to get an interview with their guidance teacher.*

They feel that the success of the current system depends on the fact that the school has a vertical guidance system. This means in theory that each pupil has the same guidance teacher throughout their school career. The teachers therefore know the pupils they are responsible for really well.

Problems and concerns

One problem identified by the staff is that young people in the school generally have difficulty writing anything positive about themselves.

> *The problem is that some kids are just totally unable to begin writing their personal statements.*

> *Scots are terrible at writing positive things about themselves.*

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They have funding for one day's cover for each guidance teacher to release them to carry out individual interviews which they feel are essential to encouraging young people to find something positive to write.

> *It's sometimes amazing just how long it takes to encourage people to say something good about themselves. They will argue strongly for the continuation of this cover when TVEI is removed.*

One problem with using the planner as the basis of the process is that it relies on pupils and teachers wanting to get involved.

> *This hands the responsibility fairly and squarely to the pupil. This fails if the pupil doesn't do it.*

> *When you get to the stage where the kids are using the planner off their own bat, you've won.*

The staff feel, however, that it is better to use the current system in which there is that risk than to have a system in which the guidance team are totally responsible for the NRA process.

Employers' lack of awareness of NRA is a concern. The staff feel it needs to be officially launched and a national budget provided to promote it. They noted that the growing interest in it from further and higher education has been important in giving it currency. Increasing numbers of pupils are coming back to the school to ask for it because of this.

Pupils' views

The following views are based on interviews with seven pupils: one from S2, two from S3 and four from S4.

S2 (one boy)

This boy generally seemed to think that his homework diary had been useful. He said it had helped him with deadlines and was good for planning his work when he had a long assignment. He felt it helped him to get his homework done on time and meant he got it done faster. It also meant he no longer needed to ring up his friends to find out what homework they had been set. He thought it needed extra space for additional notes because he had used his up. He thought that about three-quarters of the class used their diaries but that some people had lost them.

S3 (one boy, one girl)

The boy and the girl were both using their planners to write down their homework and what they were doing at weekends. They generally found them useful and used them regularly.

> *If you get into a routine of looking at it every night you never forget your homework.*

They said it helped them to look back at what they had been doing, made sure they did not forget things, kept them up to date and was useful to look up information. They had used them to set targets which were usually related to academic work. They were told to

look at them at the start of every Social Education lesson but other subject teachers never looked at them.

They had the impression that some pupils only used their planners for personal information and some had lost them.

They had completed their profiling packs in class with their guidance teacher. They felt the pack had made them think about what they wanted to do and how things would be suited to them. They were aware of NRA but had not done any work specifically towards it. They knew that employers and people from colleges might want to see it. They thought it was something to do with getting the right grades for the job you wanted to do.

S4 (three girls, one boy)

The three girls really liked their planners and used them a lot. They liked the way they looked and the layout. They thought it was good to keep all the information in one place and they had used them to organise their work.

I put down my exams and when I should revise.

It reminds you when you've got to have stuff done by, what you're doing and how you're getting on.

Teachers usually told them to put their homework assignments into their planners but never actually looked at them. The boy had not used his planner this year and thought it was only 'brainy' people that used them.

The three girls said they had had to set targets at the start of the year. They felt it did make them try harder and realise what they were not good at. They thought that they would still be trying to improve even without targets.

I wanted to try for myself more than for what was written in my planner.

It makes you look at yourself more closely, I'm going to have to really try.

We get help with making targets, achieving them is down to you.

The boy had not set targets this year, he thought it was up to the individual to do that. They thought about half the class had taken target setting seriously.

They had been working on their profiles in Social Education. They knew that their work on the profile would go towards their NRA. At first the profile had not been taken seriously, they felt they were just ticking boxes but the mention of job interviews had made them think more about it.

It actually gave you a bit of a fright when they talked about job interviews.

They had found some sections hard to fill in particularly when evaluating their own strengths. They had also found it hard to write positively about themselves in their personal statements.

It feels like you're exaggerating.

It feels like you're being big-headed.

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They would have felt better about doing it away from their classmates or if the teacher had written it for them.

One of the four thought the NRA seemed a bit pointless. She said she had seen one once and would like to see an example of a completed one. She had heard about the leavers' conference when the NRA is presented and had the impression that it had been good last year. The others thought the NRA was good and would be useful in getting a job. Two of them had been told that employers might want to see it, so they thought it was important to work at it and present it nicely.

> *It's an impressive looking thing, if it's written well I think you'd have a good chance of getting a job.*
>
> *It's like a CV really.*

They were aware that they would be updating it in S5 and adding their standard grade marks.

School B

Introduction and history of NRA in the school

School B has over 1500 pupils and is located in a town with high unemployment.

The school took part in the regional NRA pilot which began in 1991. At that time they were already doing profiling with pupils in S3 and S4. Pupils in these years had a whole afternoon per week for TVEI-related work. They were spending some of this time recording and reviewing their own progress and producing a profile. The school was happy to participate in the pilot because it seemed it would be beneficial to the pupils and because it seemed similar to the profile that they were already doing.

As part of the pilot scheme, the school received 0.2 full time equivalent (FTE) staffing allowance through TVEI and funding for additional costs. The staffing allowance was used to give each member of the guidance team a day which they used for one to one interviews on the NRA with leavers and for work with S2 pupils on their subject choices.

The pilot ran until 1993. The funding originally provided is no longer available but the school now uses Skillseekers funding provided by Scottish Enterprise for the one -to- one interviews. Other costs have been integrated into the school budget.

The process

Activities related to the NRA occur in all years (S1-S6) and are delivered mainly through Social Education. Self-assessment is being gradually introduced into some subjects as well mainly because of the emphasis placed on the assessment of achievements by Standard Grades and the 5-14 programme. Few subject teachers are doing this as yet and this description will focus on the work done towards the NRA in Social Education. A summary of NRA-related activities is shown in Table 10.3.

In S1, pupils do an exercise called 'success lifelines' through which they are encouraged to begin to identify their own achievements. In S2, pupils take 2 periods to do an exercise called 'The Me Tree'. This involves them writing about their own qualities

and skills. In S3, pupils spend 4 periods doing exercises in an NRA workbook. The NRA is introduced to pupils at this point and its usefulness post-school is emphasised. It is also explained that the information and statements in the workbook will be worked on and updated each year until the pupil leaves. There is space in the workbook for pupils to record the subjects they are taking and the grades of any qualifications attained. Pupils are instructed to begin to draft a personal statement and prompts and suggestions to help with this are provided in the workbook. Individual help is given where needed in the classroom by teachers. Sometimes a learning support teacher may also be present to help with any pupil difficulties that arise. Pupils are encouraged to write positively about the subjects they enjoy, what they are good at, what they are like themselves, their hobbies, interests and activities and any work experience and part-time jobs they have had. Finally, they are prompted to think about the sort of career they would like, to identify steps they can take to either decide on a career or to progress towards the career they have chosen and to write a few words about how they plan to train for the job they want or what qualifications they hope to attain. There is also space for them to note down any other plans they might have (eg to do a Duke of Edinburgh Award). Two periods of Social Education are spent updating the workbook in S4, S5 and S6 and there is space in it for all exercises to be redrafted.

Just before pupils leave, they are given an interview with a member of the guidance staff. The draft personal statement and other information in the workbook is checked through and possible changes are suggested. An action plan is discussed and possible next steps are suggested, discussed and agreed. There is a vertical guidance system in the school which means that pupils should have the same guidance teachers throughout school. However, this does not always work in practice because of timetabling difficulties.

The workbook was evaluated in 1993-1994: staff who had delivered it were asked for their views. It was subsequently altered to make it more accessible to pupils so that they would need less teacher support to work through it.

There is a separate centre for pupils with a range of learning difficulties in the school. Pupils in this centre use NRA materials that are simpler and more pictorial.

Parents are introduced to the NRA through a newsletter which is sent home with pupils. The newsletter explains what the NRA is and emphasises its importance.

Production of the NRA

Just before a pupil is due to leave, their workbook with their draft NRA in it is given to a secretary for word processing. The school receives funding for 23-24 hours secretarial time per week to be spent on work placements and on word processing the NRA.

Liaison with external users

In addition to the pilot being done with a local college, the school has liaised with local employers through school-industry seminars. The assistant rector spoke about the NRA at one seminar. His impression was that about half of the employers had heard of the NRA already and half had not.

Plans for the future

The timing of the individual interviews is being reconsidered. At the moment interviews are not necessarily happening at times which are most helpful to the pupils.

A pilot is being done with a local college with close links with the school. S5 Christmas leavers who stay on the school roll but move their location and take courses at the college are not given the opportunity to complete their NRAs. The school is working with the college so that the college can help these youngsters produce their NRAs.

Table 10.3: School B: NRA process and production

Year	*Activity*
S1	• Pupils identify achievements. Social Education: 1 period.
S2	• 'The Me Tree': pupils identify their qualities and skills. Social Education: 2 periods.
S3	• NRA workbook. Social Education: 4 periods.
S4	• NRA workbook - updating. Social Education: 2 periods.
S5	• NRA workbook - updating. Social Education: 2 periods.
S6	• NRA workbook - updating. Social Education: 2 periods.
Leavers	• Interview with guidance teacher. Personal statement and action plan discussed. • NRA word processed by secretary using workbook.

Staff views of NRA

Individual interviews were carried out with the assistant rector who has responsibility for coordinating NRA activity in the school, the AHT (guidance) and a learning support teacher. A joint interview was carried out with two guidance teachers.

Positive comments

It was clear that all the staff interviewed were committed to the aims of NRA.

> *I feel that the whole ethos of it is very positive and it's something we need to be encouraging the kids to do more of.*

> *I think it's a really good exercise in that these people are actually thinking about themselves.*

> *They (the pupils) are not good at selling themselves and if we are helping them a bit to do that and think of all the positives - then to me it's twofold - it's boosting their self-esteem and it's giving them something positive. I think it's very good. It's a crutch to take to an interview.*

The school would certainly continue the process in PSE time whether or not the NRA document itself survived.

The guidance teachers said that the management of NRA in the school had been very good. The management had always tried to integrate the NRA with other related initiatives such as Skillseekers and careers work and this had been largely achieved. They said they felt lucky because they had received training about NRA and because they had had an input into the evaluation of the NRA materials.

Two positive things which had come out of the school's work on the NRA were mentioned. The school had received a computer with the latest careers software through their participation in the NRA pilot. There had been a review of reporting in the school because pupils were being encouraged to include their reports in their NRAs. As a result of this, subject teachers were encouraged to write more positive statements in reports alongside diagnostic comments.

Comments on the appearance of the NRA document were generally positive.

It's very impressive on the outside.

Certainly the quality is very good - the folder, the quality of paper - I just wonder where the money's coming from.

I think personally it's excellent. I think it should be for every pupil in the country ... I like the layout ... somewhere to keep certificates - a very important document. I would want to keep it in the safest place in the house.

Their impression was that the pupils were generally proud of it.

Problems and concerns

The teachers delivering NRA all said that it was very time-consuming helping pupils to complete the exercises in their workbooks. While the materials used were good, youngsters still needed a lot of assistance from teachers in the classroom to work through them. Checking pupils' NRA workbooks is also time-consuming and it had been necessary for teachers to take them home in order to do it.

The main reason why the procedure is so time-consuming is that some pupils have great difficulty in seeing the things they do as achievements and in writing anything positive about themselves.

They believe if you talk positively about yourself you're bragging.

The children in this area tend to have a very negative opinion of themselves. They tend not to think that they've achieved very much, particularly the ones ... that are not going on to further or higher education ... a lot of our work was in encouraging them to see the achievements that they did have.

For some youngsters this is not helped by the environment in which they are growing up, in which there is high unemployment and cynicism about the value of school.

(The main problem is) getting the kids to see what their achievements are .. particularly the ones ... who are not going on to university, who are perhaps in a culture outside of school ... where school isn't really thought of as very worthwhile ... those who are going to be leaving school and they're not going to get a job. I think that aspect of it has more bearing on how they feel about it than actually what we do in school.

In addition, pupils are not used to assessing themselves and they are finding it difficult.

I think there's a wee way to go yet within education, simply because kids are not used to being asked (to assess themselves), they're not used to the language that's required of them to express what they've done. It's very much a cultural thing.

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The guidance staff expressed some concern about the use of learning support to help less able pupils produce their NRAs.

> *What you find of course and what I thought was a great problem was that the pupils requiring learning support were coming out with a better NRA sometimes than some of the pupils who did the work themselves.*

They were also concerned that word processing the final document might sometimes cover up the poor standard of a pupil's work.

There was some concern that not all staff teaching Social Education were as committed to the NRA as the guidance staff (90% of Social Education teachers are guidance staff, the rest are subject teachers).

> *I can make it alive because I believe in it but there are some pressed people, they are timetabled for fourth year social education ... we brief them and we talk to them about it. If you're not confident and your confronted with this stuff and you're not committed to it, it's a very difficult thing to put over to youngsters in the form that it is in.*

The currency and recognition of the NRA document amongst external users was of concern.

> *We can do our bit in the school, but unless you push it through right into industry and employers... eventually it'll knock back on us because people will say 'well, I took it along to X (a company) and they didn't know what I was talking about' - word gets round the community really quickly.*
>
> *We've done a bit of a job in selling the idea. But I still feel uneasy about it because I don't want ever to think that kids think I'm conning them and I think there might come a stage when that's going to happen.*
>
> *If employers are seen to be valuing it then that will get back to the kids. The kids will get to know that employers are asking for this and they'll see it as valuable.*
>
> *For so long we just depended on external examinations as a way of showing what you've achieved that that'll take a long time to break down.*

They were pleased that the NRA is now mentioned on the UCAS form as that has given it a 'seal of approval' in one sector. There was a general lack of awareness amongst the staff of how pupils were actually using their NRAs after leaving school.

One member of staff suggested that the way forward was to promote the NRA as a useful resource that the senior pupils could use when producing CVs or filling in application forms rather than to encourage employers to use it in selection.

Pupils' views

The following views are based on three group interviews carried out with small groups of pupils from the same year group.

S3 (two boys, four girls)

They had been working on their NRAs in Social Education for about three weeks. They worked on it in class with help from the Social Education teacher. They picked out statements from their reports to include in their NRA. They knew that the summative document would be produced by office staff when they left. They thought that all pupils were filling them in but that some people were not collecting them when they left school. They had also filled in an action plan. They would be doing work experience placements after the holidays which would be written up and included in the NRA. They would also have a careers interview just before leaving school and they thought they would take their NRAs to that. Their parents had not been involved at all in the process.

Views of the NRA were very mixed. Some said it was 'boring' and that they could not see its value. Others thought it was 'alright'. One young person had found it an interesting exercise.

> *I found it interesting looking back over your school career and thinking about what you've done.*

They felt it had not been mentioned since the last time they worked on it.

> *You just had to do it, we've not heard about it since.*

Some thought it would be useful for getting a job in the future and that they might take it to interviews. One pupil had found it useful looking at her own personal qualities.

Some said it had been difficult to write positively about themselves. One of them said it had been easy but embarrassing.

> *You can't discuss it, you don't want people to see what you've written in case they think you're boasting ... It's easy to write things in it you just don't want other people to see it.*

S4 (four boys, one girl)

They said they had filled in booklets in Social Education. Using the booklets, they had assessed their own personal qualities and thought about what they would like to do in the future. They had also written new personal statements. Most of them said they felt too little time had been spent on these exercises and that they had been rushed.

One of them had found writing the personal statement easy, the rest had found it difficult.

> *I could have wrote it on any one of my friends ... you don't really know what you're like yourself.*

They seemed inhibited by what the teacher might think when she read it and by what others might say.

> *It's kind of hard doing it in class as well. If you want to write a good thing people might think you're a big-head ... they might say 'no, you're not!'*

They had received varying amounts of feedback from their guidance teachers on what they had written. Some had had a series of supply teachers who they felt did not know them very

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well. They found it hard to get an appointment with a guidance teacher and thought most people only saw guidance staff when they had problems.

Some of them thought that the NRA document was too big.

It's a bit bulky.

It looks too much like a document or something - like 'This is Your Life'.

The only girl in the group liked the look of it.

It looks good - substantial.

They made some comments on the contents of the NRA. They generally thought that the qualifications, personal details and employment history were useful but views were mixed on the personal statement.

I think a lot of things in it are useless ... like the personal statement, if you're qualified, you know it's all experience-based, so if you've got qualifications and you've got the experience they're going to want you for the job.

If I was an employer I'd want to know what the person thought about themself.

One of them felt he had nothing to write in the employment history section. Several of them thought it might not be very useful for people who were not doing well at school or who did not have any hobbies.

There was little enthusiasm for continuing to update it after leaving school. Only the girl thought that she would.

One of them was doubtful about whether employers would be interested in it.

Maybe it's just a novelty ... maybe we'll go back to CVs. One of my classes is physics and ... we were looking at recruitment pages in newspapers. I never read anything about NRAs ... all of them were saying 'full CV and experience' ... once we're out there looking for jobs it's going to be new.

Another, however, thought it would be useful in an interview to have written the personal statement even if he did not take his NRA with him.

S5 (four boys, one girl)

This year they had done more work in their booklets updating what they had written in S4. They said they had found it a repetitive exercise.

Sometimes it gets a bit boring having to write the same things. I've done the NRA three times.

They felt the exercises asked the same questions in different sections.

They too expressed difficulty in writing positively about themselves.

It is embarrassing.

... if you let anyone else see it they'd maybe think you've got tickets on yourself - writing all these things about how brilliant you are.

It's hard to tell what other people think of you ... you really need someone else to write it for you.

One said that he had not learned anything new about himself by doing these exercises.

I think you really knew it inside.

Others thought the exercises had made them more self-aware and had encouraged them to try to improve.

It makes you think 'well, maybe I could be a wee bit more outgoing and try and be a bit more confident'.

You become more self-aware of what you do and things because you have had to go and write it down.

They seemed to generally value the document and like the look of it.

... it's a nice book.

I think you'd have to put it away somewhere safely.

Two of them mentioned ways that the NRA might be useful to them in the future. One said he thought that it would be quite useful to use it before an interview to remind him of what he had done or that an interviewer could use it as a guide for questions. One thought it would be easier to start putting together a CV having done an NRA. Another of them thought it was very like a CV.

It's just really like a posh CV - it saves us going out and doing it for ourselves.

One of them disagreed with this saying that he thought he would not include anything about his personal qualities in a CV. Another suggested that it was probably good to have a CV and an NRA '*... then you've got the whole range.*'

They discussed whether they would continue to update their NRAs and how useful they thought they might be in the future. One thought he might use it to hold any certificates he got in the future.

If you put all your certificates in there you won't have to go hunting for them.

He was not sure if he would continue to update his NRA, saying it would depend on how useful it was the first time he used it in a job interview. Several of them recognised that the NRA would need to be updated in the future otherwise it would quickly lose its usefulness.

I think it's the sort of thing you've got to be totally committed to - either updating it every so often or ... if you're in a job interview at 27 and here's something you wrote when you were 16 - it's not exactly really relevant.

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Some were clear that they would not update their NRAs in the future.

> *It would be impractical ... you go to university you don't bother about what you did at school.*

One thought that employers might not trust the information in an updated NRA because it could be fabricated.

> *You could have written - not that you would - you could write total lies in it ... slightly exaggerate what you actually do ... not that I would do that, eh.*

Several of them seemed dubious about how useful an NRA might be in an interview.

> *It's really strung out - it's like a longer CV - they want you in and out they're not going to take 6 years to read it.*

> *... it's a good idea but I don't think it'll be used to its full potential because at the end of the day if you're 30 and you're going for a job it's not going to matter ... if you've got all your qualifications in it ... (what matters is that) you are qualified and how you present yourself on the day.*

Another said he thought that interviewers would want to ask them direct questions to see how they handled certain situations rather than finding out about them by referring to a book.

They had been told by their teachers that you needed to tick a box on the UCAS form to indicate whether you had an NRA. They had also been told that more and more employers were starting to look for it.

School C

Introduction and history of NRA in the school

The school has just over 580 pupils and is situated in a small township with 3000 people in a rural area. The school also services another town which has a population of 4000.

The school took part in the regional authority's pilot for profiling and NRA in 1991. They received a lot of support from the region for their participation in the pilot, including additional staffing equivalent to one full time post (1 FTE), software, in-service training, access to centrally developed materials, central validation of their own materials and the support of both a regional development officer and a TVE development officer. Since 1991 the school has been required to deliver the NRA to all leavers through the TVEI Extension Contract. Through this contract the school was required to allocate 0.6 of the TVE FTE provision and the TVE secretarial support for this purpose. The region has also provided staff cover through Skillseekers to allow action planning interviews.

The aim initially was to introduce the action planning process into all years from S1-S4. This process would culminate in the production of an NRA. They decided to use 5-14 reporting, which focuses on strengths, development needs and next steps, in the action planning process and introduced exercises whereby pupils reviewed their reports and used them to set themselves targets. This necessitated staff producing additional reports.

The process

The NRA process in the school is mainly delivered through the Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme which takes place in a weekly period called tutor. Subject

profiling also takes place in all subjects in all years. This involves self-assessment and target setting. Profiling forms a large part of the reviewing and self evaluation process that pupils go through in their school careers.

The work done in tutor time and the profiling process are described in detail below and summarised in Table 10.4.

Tutor

All pupils in years S1-S4 have a weekly 40 minute slot called tutor, which is taken by a subject teacher. Activities related to the NRA were initially introduced into tutor for pupils in S3 and S4 and they are gradually being introduced for pupils in other years. The school has developed a range of materials for the delivery of the NRA which are based on exemplars and guidelines provided by the region.

Pupils in S2 do a self-assessment and target setting exercise using their reports. The exercise guides pupils to note down skills that they have improved, skills that they need to work on, areas they need to work on in class and subjects they could develop at standard grade. Pupils are then instructed to choose three targets and work out what steps they would need to take to reach them.

In January of S3, pupils work through an action plan journal. This involves reviewing their S2 targets, reviewing their reports, assessing themselves in areas such as attendance, behaviour and homework, noting down their achievements, responsibilities and outside interests and evaluating their own skills and qualities. Pupils are instructed to set new targets which are specific, realistic and measurable. Finally, they are asked to list their activities and experiences outside of school, their school activities and experiences and their certificates gained.

In the Summer of S3, pupils review the targets they set in January. They identify which parts they have achieved and, if they have not reached their targets, work out why not. In pairs they discuss ways to overcome areas of difficulty. They set new targets and identify how they will know they have achieved them. Using their reports, they review their progress in subjects and identify 2-3 subjects they would like to improve in. They also note down skills and qualities that have been mentioned in their reports.

In January of S4, again reports and previous targets are reviewed and new targets are set in each subject. The materials are now less directive. Instructions are more general, for example 'You should choose your technique from those used in your previous assessment and employ this to arrive at targets and next steps in each subject'. Pupils are helped to identify their strengths and weaknesses. They list their achievements, responsibilities and activities since their last review and assess their own attitudes and behaviour.

In the Summer of S4, pupils work through another action plan journal which again involves reviewing, self-assessment and target setting exercises. It also includes a section on career ideas, and instructs pupils to identify their next steps. Pupils also complete a review of their work experiences which looks at their skills and achievements. Finally, they complete a personal record of achievement booklet. Parts of this, such as attendance, are printed out for pupils, the main work for pupils here is to complete their personal statements and action plan journal.

This forms the bulk of the work towards the NRA. Pupils who stay on in S6, update their NRAs in their own time. In addition, guidance teachers see pupils from S5 in groups, by arrangement.

Table 10.4: School C: NRA process and production

Year	*Activity*
S2	• Self assessment and target setting using reports.
S3	• Action plan journal: review, self assessment and target setting (January).
	• Review of reports and previous targets. New targets set (Summer).
	• Two 15 minute interviews, one with a guidance teacher the other with a teacher who takes tutor.
S4	• Work experience placement plus module.
	• Interview with careers adviser.
	• Review of reports and previous targets (January).
	• Action plan journal: review, self assessment, target setting (Summer).
	• Work experience review.
	• Personal record of achievement workbook.
S5/S6	• Updating of NRA.
Leavers	• NRA word processed by a secretary.

Profiling

Profiling is taking place in every subject in all years but not necessarily with every pupil in each year at the moment. For example, in mathematics, profiling is only being done with certain classes. The aim of profiling is to introduce an element of self-assessment and target setting into subjects. The profiling process varies from subject to subject. In English, pupils assess their own work against criteria that they are given for each kind of task. Teachers stick post-its with comments onto pupils' work. Pupils then stick these together with their own assessments into their profiling booklets against the appropriate criteria. Using this, pupils can identify areas that they need to work on. Next time they do a particular kind of exercise they can look up in their profiles how they have done in the past and what they need to be aware of in order to improve. Pupils are encouraged to set broader targets in English as well, for example, they may set targets to do with their attitude or behaviour in the subject. In mathematics, teachers, pupils and parents all give a comment on each block of work as it is completed. These comments are kept in a small booklet as a record of a pupil's progress.

Other aspects of the process

In S3, pupils are also given two 15 minute interviews with their guidance teachers during which they are helped to review their progress and set targets. The guidance staff are given a few days' cover in order to allow them to do this. There is a vertical guidance system

in the school which means that pupils have the same guidance teacher throughout their school careers.

All pupils in S4 do a one week work experience placement as part of the SCOTVEC work experience module, and this is used as a vehicle for self-evaluation in tutor.

Pupils in S4 have individual interviews with careers advisers during which an action plan is decided. This is then written up by the careers adviser and later included in the NRA.

Production of the NRA

NRAs are finally produced for leavers by a secretary using software which has been provided by the region. Schools are provided with secretarial support through TVEI and they are required to allocate this to the production of NRAs.

Liaison with external users

The school has good links with local employers and works with them to provide work experience for the youngsters at the school. The impression of the staff is that employers do not understand the NRA and are not using it to its full potential in recruiting young people.

Plans for the future

The funding provided for secretarial support will stop at some point in the future so the region is looking at the possibility of getting pupils to word process their own NRAs.

At the moment, guidance staff carry out interviews with S3 pupils only. This has been run on a trial basis so far. In the future they would like to interview pupils in all years but recognise that it will be difficult to find the time to do this.

Pupils in S5 do not have tutor and there is no official meeting point for them with their guidance teachers at the moment. The guidance staff are now negotiating to take them out of subject time for 5 double periods in a term for guidance work including work on the NRA.

Staff views of NRA

The following views are based on individual interviews with an S4 tutor, two members of the guidance staff and the rector and a telephone interview with the ex-depute headteacher.

Positive comments

The ex-depute headteacher had clearly been the driving force behind introducing and developing the NRA in the school and he expressed commitment to the aims of the NRA. The other staff interviewed generally mentioned more concerns and problems with the NRA than positive aspects. The following positive comments were made, however.

One member of staff said she thought the NRA provided a good opportunity for pupils to think about where they were going, what they wanted to do and to reflect back on what they had done with their lives so far. She said that she thought, with time, pupils would get used to thinking about their achievements and setting goals and accept this as a matter of course rather than as an exercise that they did intermittently.

One member of staff had had positive feedback from pupils who had taken their NRAs to interviews.

> *I've been very encouraged by the response from those who have been to interviews with it. Some people have said they based the interview on it.*

Another saw it as a valuable exercise but expressed concern over its acceptance by employers.

> *I'm delighted that the NRAs around but it's how it's marketed, the use of it is the important bit. I can see the value for kids and I can see the value for employers but employers haven't been made aware of the importance of it.*

One commented that it was valuable to have an NRA in an interview because it took the focus away from the young person onto their NRA.

Problems and concerns

There was some concern expressed by the guidance staff that the tutors delivering PSE had not been trained to deliver the NRA. Some tutors were rushing through the materials and not taking time to encourage youngsters to identify their own achievements. The tutor interviewed felt the materials were self-explanatory and that if she needed to she would ask the guidance staff or other tutors for help. One guidance teacher suggested that tutors could be trained to do the individual interviews with pupils and this would take the burden off guidance staff. Concern was expressed that the system is dependent on tutors cataloguing the materials properly and that if tutors left this might leave gaps in the procedure.

At the moment, not all pupils are leaving with an NRA. Some pupils in S6 left last year without them: they had been introduced to recording achievement in S4 and had updated their RoA in S5, but in the end failed to complete their personal statements. Also a small number of S4 pupils left without completing NRAs because they had missed lessons and failed to write their personal statements.

Some concern was expressed about employers' lack of awareness of the NRA and the pupils' use of it after leaving school.

> *There was a huge investment in NRAs and employers are not au fait with it. So there's a mismatch between the expectations on schools and the expectations beyond school.*
>
> *It hasn't been marketed at all - that's my bottom line. I find it incredible.*
>
> *There's still a selling job to be done with employers.*
>
> *I do wonder - and I've no experience so far - what happens to the record of achievement when it leaves here. Do the pupils who take it away really make use of it when they go for interviews? Does the employer pay a great deal of attention to it and that will no doubt vary from employer to employer? Does a pupil really see that this RoA is really something that can be kept and added to year in year out until even if you're 35 and applying for another job?*

There is some ambiguity about whether the school should be responsible for updating NRAs for ex-pupils. If pupils update their own NRAs without verification they could in theory falsify information.

Another concern is that the careers action plan is written for pupils in S4 and included in the NRA even for pupils who leave in S6. At this stage the information in it is often out of date and irrelevant and may even be detrimental as a pupil may be going for a completely different job to the one they wanted when they were 15.

There were a few comments about the differential in the value of the NRA to different groups of pupils. Concern was expressed that pupils leaving in S4 often had less to put into an NRA and found it more difficult to complete than pupils who were staying on at school.

> *It's a lot of work for guidance staff. It works fine for the pupils who are diligent and write up everything on time, but the pupils who are going to need it, the pupils who are leaving for employment ... are the ones who are most difficult to get anything down. ...These are the ones who have to have so much help. A lot of ones were perhaps absent for lessons and therefore it's not fully there.*

> *I just wonder about the use of it for pupils who are going straight to university. They are the ones who've got the best ones because they're the pupils who've done most and they've not sat around, they've had lots of interests, they've written an interesting personal statement but what are they going to do with it? If it is going to come into university entrance or for interview all well and good but I can't see them sending off a huge maroon folder every time they want a university application.*

Some pupils seemed to be having difficulty in evaluating themselves.

> *And some pupils do find it very difficult to be self-critical. That's what we're asking them to do - to open up and say 'no, I'm not perfect and here's something I need to improve on'.*

A related problem is that if the teachers give pupils examples of personal statements to work from they just copy them. One guidance teacher said that one year she received many personal statements' that began 'I am a quiet sort of person'.

Pupils' views

The following views are based on interviews with small groups of pupils from each year group from S3-S6. The interviews were carried out in August, so pupils were mostly asked about their experiences in the previous academic year.

S3 (2 girls, 4 boys)

They said they had done self-assessment exercises, target-setting and reviewed their reports in tutor time in S2.

They had found the exercises repetitive. They said they had to write down their targets in several places and that they were asked the same questions again and again when they were doing the self-assessment exercises. One of them had found the exercises useful.

> *It gave you an idea of what subjects you needed to work harder in.*

One said it would have been more helpful if they had referred to their targets more often.

> *You wrote them down and you looked at it at the time ... but then they got filed away and you don't see them again. So it's not really that much use because you can't look at them to see if you've improved or not.*

One did not see the point of having tutor in S2. He said he thought that it had not been useful to them at all.

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They had spent some time on careers in tutor thinking about what their next steps should be. They said this had helped them to choose their subjects for S3.

They had seen an NRA and generally seemed positive about its appearance.

It looks pretty good.

They thought they would use it to get a job and that it would show how 'brainy' they were. One said that you could keep it so that you would know what you had done.

S4 (3 girls, 3 boys)

They said they had spent a few weeks in S3 working through the action plan journal. They had had guidance interviews in which they had reviewed their reports and set targets. They had assessed their own work in subjects.

They mostly seemed to think that setting targets had made them work harder. One had found it hard to stick to her targets because she had forgotten them. It had seemed like a good exercise at the time but then they did not see their targets again. Another had also forgotten what his targets were.

One said that the self-assessment exercise had been difficult because they were asked to tick boxes and it was often difficult to say one way or the other what they were like because it often depended on the circumstances.

They liked the look of the NRA.

It looks really smart, it's like leather.

They thought that they would take them to job interviews.

They said they had spent some time in tutor doing the jiig-cal careers exercise. This had told them what kind of jobs would suit them. They had not had individual interviews with careers advisers yet.

S5 (3 girls, 3 boys)

They said they had worked through the NRA booklets in S4. They had looked at their own skills and qualities, reviewed their report and set targets.

One had found the exercises repetitive. They seemed to cover the same things again and again. They said they had worked through the exercises in class and had little help from their tutors.

One said he had found setting targets had made him think about what he was doing before his exams and he had consequently worked harder. He said he felt it had focused him on what he needed to do. Several said they had not found target setting useful to them in the long term.

They mostly liked the look of the NRA. One was indifferent. They said they thought they would use the NRA in interviews. One thought it would show people what they had done. They questioned whether there would be any facility for updating it when they left school.

One had already completed her NRA because she had left school for a year and then come back. She had given it to a potential employer before an interview. The employer

did not mention it in the interview. She did not know if the NRA had been useful in that situation.

They had had careers interviews. These had focused on identifying steps they could take to get to where they wanted to go.

S6 (3 girls, 2 boys)

They said they had worked on their NRAs in S5 and felt pressured to get them done. They still had tutor but had to update and finish their NRAs in their own time. They said they had not reviewed their reports nor set targets. They had been taught study skills in tutor and they felt these had come a bit late in their school career to be useful.

They said they thought the NRA was more useful for someone leaving school in S4 than for someone going to university. This was because those going to university would be getting a job years after leaving school and a lot of the information in the NRA (such as whether they had been in the scouts or gained a SCOTVEC in painting) would be irrelevant to an employer. One said she thought there was too much unnecessary detail in the NRA (for example her guide badges).

One had been for an interview at university and had not been asked for an NRA. One thought the NRA might be useful to colleges and universities if they were trying to select students for over-subscribed courses as it might help them distinguish between candidates. Another suggested that if selectors needed to distinguish candidates then they could just interview them. They thought a CV could contain all the useful information from an NRA. They thought it might be useful to refer to in the future for dates and details. One thought it would be quite handy for keeping her certificates together. One said she thought the NRA was not helpful to her but she had not minded too much doing the work towards it.

They had done work experience placements in S4. One had found this disappointing because he had been given menial tasks to do and he felt he had not really found out what the job he was interested in was like.

They had had careers interviews a few years before. They were generally not impressed by these. They said they had not been particularly helpful to them in choosing their highers. They said they had found out for themselves from other sources which highers they needed to do for their chosen careers.

■ School D

Introduction and history of NRA in the school

School D is a Roman Catholic school with 630 pupils located in a city.

The school was using the regional authority's RoA before the introduction of the NRA. The region strongly encouraged all its schools to adopt the NRA when it was first introduced. It provided some in-service training, additional software on SCAMP and developed and piloted Hypercard software for the production of NRA in 16 schools throughout the region. The school used some TVEI funding to help develop NRA in the school. Now, with devolved school management (DSM), the school must provide support for further development of the NRA from its own resources.

Originally work experience and RoA were curricular add-ons. Now the school is aiming to integrate (usually existing) activities across the curriculum to create 'a whole-

school programme of personal development of which work experience is one part and NRA is the icing on the cake'. At the moment, those responsible for NRA are working towards this aim and still negotiating with some subject teachers in order to try and realise the cross-curricular implications of it. The 5 year development plan ('91-'96) has instigated changes to assessment. The school now uses an achievement model in which teachers are required to communicate clearly to pupils the targets they should be aiming for in a course. This change is part of the general move in the school towards encouraging pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning.

The process

The key aspects of the NRA process in the school are detailed below and summarised in Table 10.5. Because the school is attempting to integrate activities across the curriculum into a whole school programme of personal development, it is difficult to describe everything that might be classed as relevant to the NRA. This description focuses on those aspects which are explicitly part of the process and tries to mention other areas which are also relevant.

Table 10.5: School D: NRA process and production

Year	*Activity*
S1	• Thinking Skills: the 4 point plan (scan-plan-do-evaluate) is introduced; a planner is given out and checked weekly; logical problem-solving skills are developed. • Social Education: a personal development folder is used for self-assessment and reviewing progress.
S2	• Social Education: personal development folder activities are continued. Individual planners are made by pupils and checked by teachers every 4 weeks.
S3	• Life and Work Module: a project is completed which involves evaluation, target-setting and action planning.
S4	• Work Experience Module: the NRA is drafted, then reviewed and rewritten in light of the placement. • Careers interview and mock interviews take place.
S5/S6	• PDT is used for updating and production of the NRA at pupils' discretion.
Leavers S4/S5/S6	• Students produce their NRAs themselves using Hypercard software in their own time or in PDT if computers are available.

In S1, pupils have one period a week called Thinking Skills. In actuality, half of this course is spent on thinking skills and half on planning skills. Pupils are introduced to a 4 point planning process (scan-plan-do-evaluate), which is an approach they are encouraged to adopt for every task they are given. They are also given exercises to do which are aimed at helping them to develop logical problem-solving skills. They are given a planner and instructed to use it to organise their homework and extra-curricular activities. The planner is checked weekly by the teacher at this stage to encourage its use. In this way it is hoped that pupils will start to organise their own time and start to plan ahead. In Social

Education, pupils make their own personal development folder (PDF) and build upon some elements of the Primary Passport which they have brought with them from primary school. This is the end-product of a project which they have done about themselves. The continuation of this work involves self-assessment exercises and reviews of their own progress.

In S2, some Social Education time is used to continue with PDF activities. The concept of evaluation is introduced and pupils evaluate a planner which they are given and then design and make one of their own. They are encouraged to use this to organise all their activities including hobbies and outside interests, and it is checked on once a month by the teacher. Pupils also do a small amount of target setting in this time.

In S3, pupils do the SCOTVEC Life and Work module. As part of this they are required to complete a project which involves evaluation, target setting and action planning. Part of the aim of the module is the development of skills such as working in a team and project planning.

In S4, pupils do the 40 hour SCOTVEC Work Experience module over 16 weeks. This is introduced as a personal development module. Pupils are given workbooks which introduce them to the core skills (communication, problem solving, personal, numeracy, information technology and modern language skills) and guide them through placement selection and contact with employers. Pupils complete first drafts of their NRAs, which include action plans, before their placements. After the placements, they review theexperience with reference to their action plans and review and re-write their NRAs in light of what they have learned.

In S5 and S6, pupils have one period a week of Personal Development Time (PDT). This time is aimed at meeting individual social, vocational and educational needs and pupils negotiate how they use the time. This time has been used with pupils who have not been through the NRA process to introduce the NRA and the software for its production. Pupils are given photocopies of the NRA sheets to practice on and only given the actual sheets when the document is ready to be finally printed out.

Each pupil is given a formal careers interview at some point from S4 onwards, which leads to the production of the careers action plan by the careers adviser. Before this, careers advice is available on request and in S2, some careers advice is incorporated into Social Education to help pupils make their subject choices.

No formal interviews are organised at present with guidance staff; however, they are available to see individuals on request.

All subject teachers have been made aware of the 4 point plan and they have been asked to encourage youngsters to use it for all tasks. Posters with the plan on are displayed around the school. Teachers are also requested to ask to see students' planners in order to encourage pupils to use them.

In some subject areas activities relevant to the NRA process are occurring but may not necessarily be recognised as such by the teachers. For example, one of the teachers interviewed pointed out that in art, assessment used to focus only on the finished product, but now, with the introduction of standard grade, the whole design process is assessed. This means that pupils must show evidence of investigation, consideration of ideas, the final solution and evaluation of the work. This is very similar to the 4 point plan but is not seen by the teacher as part of the NRA process.

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Production of the NRA

Pupils produce their own NRAs using Hypercard Helpstack software. This is done in their own time, or in PDT time if computers are available. They are introduced to the software by the guidance staff and then help is available should they need it later.

Liaison with external users

The school has strong links with local employers through the work placement scheme. In addition, all pupils are given a mock interview by a local employer in S4. The school is hoping in the future to ask the employers who are involved in interviewing to give students feedback on their NRAs.

Plans for the future

As mentioned in the introduction, the school is hoping to eventually raise the awareness of the staff about the opportunities offered by their subjects for pupils to develop or consolidate skills and to take more responsibility for their own learning.

> *What we're trying to plan is a continuum through the curriculum which is going to ... culminate through S4 and into S5 with the production of the NRA.*

Negotiations are underway with the computer studies teachers to try and get them to introduce the NRA software in computer studies time. The software could be used as a practical exercise through which pupils learned to use the computers. It would also solve existing computer access problems.

The guidance staff are hoping to develop an advanced organiser for pupils in S3 and S4. This would be a computer printout of the deadlines and busy periods in the year for each individual pupil based on information gathered from teachers about homework requirements and deadlines in each subject. The organiser would also be useful for parents, as they would be able to see when their children would be busy or facing deadlines. The software for the organiser has been developed but now the school is looking for some money from the region to develop it further and maybe pilot it with other schools.

Some subject teachers have had difficulty with the fact that PDT time for pupils in S5 and S6 is based on individual needs and is negotiable because this is a departure from the approach to teaching that they are used to. In the future PDT will be taken by management and guidance staff to try and overcome this.

Staff views of NRA

The following views are based on individual interviews with 6 members of staff: the PT guidance, the PT art, the headteacher, the AHT curriculum, the PT guidance (S5 and S6) and the AHT guidance.

Positive comments

The staff were clearly committed to the aims of the NRA. Several members of staff made comments on the value of the NRA to pupils.

> *It recognises a pupil's achievements in a way other than awarding them a certificate or giving them a prize. Pupils - in terms of their own self-esteem - if you work in the correct way with it you are enhancing the pupil's self-esteem or helping them establish their own self-esteem and it gives you an opportunity to negotiate in a genuine way with pupils - it's not an in-house thing...They know it's going to go outside the school and therefore they know it's got some kind of value.*

For the pupils it's very important and useful for them that at the end of 6 years they've got somewhere ... a record of the 6 years. There are precious moments and formative experiences that can be lost. I think it's something they will treasure later on. I think that sort of thing is important.

One said that NRA had enhanced existing practices in the school.

I think it's an excellent idea. We've been doing similar things ourselves for a wee while I must admit. Any kind of new initiative when it comes in I tend to look and see where can it fit in to the pattern that already exists in the school, what are the plus factors that this is bringing to us. And as with life and work and work experience it gave us time within the curriculum to make these things mainstream which they weren't necessarily before. By bedding NRA into work experience and into the PSE programme, what we've been able to do is enhance social education and it's given us time to do these things.

Another talked about how the NRA could bring the whole educational experience together.

That's what we're trying to do ... to see NRA for what it was clearly intended as something that brings the whole learning experience and development experience together and makes the people aware of what's happening. And also gives them something they can present to other people, and say 'that's what's happened to me' ... it's really the quality control for the educational experience.

One member of staff said it was a good idea but that it needed to be introduced to pupils as early as possible for it to be effective.

I basically think it's an excellent idea but I think for it to work properly it has to start right at the bottom of the school with more self responsibility. I think that schools up to now are assuming that the teacher knows best and the teacher will tell kids what to do ... and they don't really require to do a lot of thinking for themselves.

Problems and concerns

The drawback of giving pupils responsibility for completing their own NRAs is that some pupils are leaving without them. It seems that some pupils do not realise the value of the NRA.

It only really works if the pupils take ownership of it early on ... by and large when they get to 6th year they are capable of that sort of thing but even so they need a fair amount of support. They don't perhaps see the importance or the value of it. They just see it as another task you give them.

Some S5 and S6 leavers are choosing not to complete their NRAs. Those completing them tend to be the ones leaving at the end of S5. Pupils going on to higher education sometimes use it to produce a personal statement for their UCAS forms and then feel they have got what they wanted from it. All S4 leavers have been through the process, they all complete draft documents but then not all of them are finalising the document. The staff provide support and encouragement, sometimes giving up their own time to do this so they feel they are doing what they can.

Some of the staff mentioned that they would like subject teachers to be more involved in the NRA process. Clearly, target setting and the 4 point plan are being used already in some

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subjects but not recognised as a contribution towards the NRA. In other subject areas, such as science, self-evaluative exercises would enhance existing learning approaches. Using computer studies time to introduce the NRA software would solve computer access problems and save guidance staff time. At the moment some NRAs are being handwritten because pupils cannot get access to the computers available. The lack of involvement of subject teachers means that they are still not achieving their aim of integrating it across the curriculum.

> *For those who are trying to coordinate it it's difficult because to be really effective it should really involve all the activities that pupils participate in throughout the school.*

Several members of staff said that time and money were needed in order to really implement NRA in the way they would like to.

> *Any project that's looking at the delivery of NRA has to start looking at how much is it actually going to cost because this is an extra on an already heavily burdened ... group of willing workers and you cannot ask staff to implement initiatives and not get time to do it. That's the bottom line and it's heavy. And there are a few mugs who do it because the interest is there and it's more an academic interest in the long term objectives... but it's the same problem - we've got no time.*

Pupils' views

The following views are based on interviews carried out with individuals or pairs of students. All the pupils had recently moved into their present years, so most of the interviews focused on what they had done in the previous year.

S2 (one girl, one boy)

In S1 they had been told to look at their planners every week in Thinking Skills. They had used them to organise their homework and hobbies. At the start they thought there was no point and did not like them but they got used to the idea and found them useful in the end. One said the planner had helped in getting homework in on time. No other teachers apart from the Thinking Skills teachers had mentioned the planners but they also have a homework diary.

In S2 they had evaluated a planner that they had been given and designed their own. It was up to them to use their own planners if they wanted to and they said they thought they would. They had not enjoyed making their own planners. They said they thought this was boring. They thought the ones given out were very plain and limited because they only had Monday-Saturday in.

They had done the 4 point plan in S1. They had used it themselves in tests and found it helpful. It had been a new idea to them when they first came to the school. Also in thinking skills they had done exercises involving sorting shapes. They said they did not know what these had to do with thinking skills. They said they were generally glad that they had done thinking skills.

They had looked at their own strengths and weaknesses and hobbies in Social Education. They said they had had to think about their strengths and weaknesses to work out what they were. They had thought of some goals and it was up to them to meet them. They thought it was 'alright' doing it. They said they thought it would maybe be useful when they were older.

They had answered some questions about tough decisions they had made about maturing (eg do you feel older now? how much freedom do you get in your own home). They thought this might be useful when they make their choices in S2.

S3 (two boys)

One said he had found his planner very useful when he was preparing for his S2 tests. He said he used to study the night before for an exam but he had used his planner to organise his revision this time and had done quite well in the tests. Other than this he had used his planner as a diary. The other one said he had not used his planner because he has his own organiser. They had been told they should use their planners but it was up to them if they did or not.

A scan-plan-do-evaluate poster had appeared on the wall halfway through S2 and they said it was not really explained to them. Both said they already had approaches to completing tasks. One said his was very similar to scan-plan etc: he worked out what he had to do, did it and checked it over. The other said his parents had told him about the scan-plan approach in P7 but that he has his own approach now. He collects research on a project, picks out the bits he needs, does rough drafts and a proper draft, then he scans over it for mistakes.

They said they had found the other exercises they had done in thinking skills (eg puzzles, dot-to-dots) 'very, very, very boring'. They could not see how they would be useful to them. They did not think they had used any of it since, except for possibly a little bit in maths. They said it would have been better if the problem-solving had been more difficult.

They had written a self-evaluative essay in S2 about what they thought they had done for the year, what they had to do and what they wanted to do the next year, including in their hobbies. They thought this had been a good exercise.

It was quite useful. It taught you a wee bit about yourself.

They had found the teachers really helpful when they were making their subject choices. One science teacher had really helped one of them to find out what subjects he needed to do to get to where he wanted to go. They had also received help to fill in the forms in Social Education.

They had not seen an NRA but thought they knew what it was for.

A record of achievement that you show to your employer.

They thought it showed what you had done in school and included a record of your attendance.

S4 (one girl)

She had been given a planner in thinking skills in S1 and told to use it to plan her homework for the week. She said she found it did make a difference that week: she had been more organised doing her homework, whereas usually she just put it in her homework diary and did it the night before. She said she would not have done that if she had not been encouraged to by the teacher.

She had found the other exercises that they had done in thinking skills boring and pointless.

I didn't really see the point of thinking skills ... Everybody really dreaded it.

In Social Education, they had debated issues. She said she had learned something from that. They had also written about their personal lives in a diary. When they had time they wrote down what they had done. They had been told to write a personal statement about themselves in English and had done an exercise called 'me' about the ages of their family members and their activities outside of school. She had found this a bit difficult.

Sometimes you know what kind of person you are but you don't want to put it on paper.

I think a friend that you really know well should confirm it.

She had been told at the beginning of S4 about the NRA. She was working on it at the moment in the work experience module. She liked the look of the NRA but did not fully understand it yet.

I think it looks really, really good.

I understand it in a way but I don't really know what some of what's in it means - it's sort of coming to me. Once I get through the whole booklet I'll understand it more.

She had not quite decided what she would do for her work placement yet. She knew that the employer would write a report on her which would be included in her NRA. She said they had been told to pick a placement in which they would improve something they were not already good at. She said she thought the NRA would be useful when getting a job. An employer would be able to use it to see what they were like when they were younger.

S5 (one girl, one boy)

They had been introduced to the NRA at the end of S3. One said he had never seen the NRA folder. The other had and thought it looked good.

I think it's nice ... it's presentable, it's neat.

They had worked on their NRAs in the work experience module before going on their placements. One said he and his class had lost their draft NRAs in a fire and had had to start again from scratch after the placement. Some people had experienced difficulty in getting a placement and had spent a lot of time doing that rather than filling in their booklets. One said she had really enjoyed her work experience placement, the other said he had found it useful because he had found out that he did not want to be a primary school teacher after all.

After the placement they had written their personal statements and CVs for their NRAs. One said he had not had any difficulty in filling in the personal statement. The other had found it a bit harder.

I asked a few people what they thought of me and they said 'kind' and things like that so I just put that down. It is quite hard to think of things about yourself. You don't really think about yourself - like what's good about you.

One praised the exercises they had used to help them fill in the NRA.

I think they've been good in the way they've done them, they made it really easy to understand, easy to follow. You've got checklists to check what you've done which means you don't miss anything out.

She said they had received a lot of help from their teacher, who had helped them to think of what to put in it, marked anything they had done wrong and made suggestions for their personal statements. The teacher also took her for English so she felt the teacher knew her well. The other said he had found completing the NRA useful.

> *I think it was quite beneficial. Like you look yourself at what you've achieved. You don't realise yourself what you've done until you put it down on paper.*

One thought he would use his NRA to keep certificates together. He said the personal statement would be useful because it shows people what you have done personally and also what you enjoy doing. He said he thought he would continue to use his NRA when he left school. The other said she thought she would have done something like this herself even if the school had not told her to do it. She said she thought she would have to use it when she went for a job or for a place at college or university. She said it presented a broad picture of a person.

> *It's not just about the qualifications you've got, it's about your personality, what people think of you.*

Both knew people who had completed their NRAs and left school. One said a friend of his had taken her NRA to an interview at a local college and the interviewers had seemed really pleased that she had taken it along. One said that the teachers had told them that employers probably would start using the NRA in the future.

Recent leaver (one boy)

He said he was still working on his NRA using the software available. He said that they were left to work on it themselves after leaving school. Some people had chosen to hand-write it. The software had been introduced to them in PDT time in S6. He was unaware of the NRA in S1-S4 so the emphasis for himself and his peers had been on producing the document after leaving school rather than on a process.

He said he had not used it to get a place at university.

> *I was told myself that if you didn't have an NRA it wouldn't make any difference to if you'd be accepted or not so that's why I wasn't really working on it right through the day to get it finished.*

Others, he said, had had similar experiences.

> *Hardly anybody has used it for university. A few people were struggling to get it done but it was by no means essential and if it's not essential then people tend not to bother with it.*

He said they had been told to do the NRA if they wanted to in PDT time. It is up to them how they use the time. Worksheets had been provided to help them complete it. He had received a lot of help from a teacher to complete his UCAS personal statement and he had used this as the basis for his NRA statement. The software had been helpful because it explains what to put into different sections. There had been a few practical problems with the software but he said he thought the idea was good.

He said he found writing the personal statement OK. He had experienced difficulty separating some of the sections in the NRA. He said the personal statement and other achievements and experiences overlapped. He suggested they could be made into one section. He also thought other achievements and experiences could be incorporated into school achievements. They had been told to include core skills and qualities in other achievements and experiences and he suggested this would be more usefully included in the personal statement.

He still needed to write an action plan. He was finding this difficult and had never done anything like it before. He said it would maybe be OK to do it for a year ahead but not for any more than that. He had drawn up a plan of action with a careers officer at the beginning of S6. He had found that very useful, particularly a sheet he had been given which showed important deadlines for people wanting to go to university.

He said one disadvantage of the NRA was that it highlighted gaps in experience.

> *Some people might find it more useful just to have a CV ... I've left the employment history section blank and that doesn't look very good. In a CV I would just completely leave it out. So it just sort of shows up areas as well as boasting about who you are.*

He said he would like to update it in future but was concerned about whether he would be able to do this given that he does not have access to a computer.

■ Analysis and commentary

The rationale for writing these case studies has been to explore the variations in implementing the NRA in unique settings. Their value, therefore, lies in their variety rather than in any attempt to generalise from one to another - or indeed to all other schools. Nevertheless, it is of interest to look for similarities between them which may shed light upon our interpretation of the survey data.

In the next two sections we summarise the points made first by teachers and then by pupils in the four schools. These provide a useful starting point in identifying key themes and issues. However, a word of caution is necessary: since the interview questions invited a wide range of free responses it cannot be assumed that those who did not mention a particular point did not hold this view.

■ Staff views

In three of the four schools the majority of staff who were interviewed made statements that indicated a high level of commitment to the NRA. In the fourth school staff raised rather more problems in interview, but this was probably related to a recent change in staffing of the NRA. This school also had high aspirations for integrating the NRA with existing structures, such as the system for reporting to parents, and this would be likely to raise more problems than a less ambitious approach.

In three schools the completed NRA *product* was seen as an important record of a pupil's achievements which rewarded effort and had a public value. Where the NRA was presented to pupils at a formal leaving ceremony it was seen by one teacher to serve as a rite of passage to the adult world.

The *process* of working towards the NRA was seen as very important in these three schools. In two of them staff emphasised the role that the NRA played in helping pupils

to develop self-esteem and learn skills of self-presentation. In the third one-to-one interviews for the NRA appeared to have enabled closer relationships between teacher and pupil.

In two of the schools, staff believed the NRA had made a significant impact upon practice in teaching and learning. It had added value to existing initiatives by providing greater coherence.

Staff in all four schools also raised a number of concerns.

In terms of the value of the NRA as a *product*, staff from three of the four schools felt very concerned about the lack of awareness of the NRA among employers. They believed there was an urgent need to market the NRA. The credibility of the NRA was seen to rest upon its currency with employers and FE/HE, and in two schools staff said it had made things easier now that the UCAS form asked for an NRA.

In two of the schools it was clear that staff had very little idea of whether, and if so how, the NRA was used by pupils once they left school.

In terms of the *process* of producing the NRA staff in three of the schools noted that pupils had great difficulty in writing about themselves. However, there was a difference of emphasis: staff in two of the schools saying that pupils found it difficult to present themselves in a positive light, and a teacher in the third noting that they found it difficult to be self-critical.

In two of the schools staff emphasised that the NRA process was very time-consuming for both pupils and staff, and in three of them teacher work load was seen as a significant problem.

In all four schools there was concern about who exactly was involved in overseeing pupils' work on the NRA. In two schools there was anxiety that untrained or uncommitted staff were undertaking this work. In a third school some anxiety was expressed about staff's involvement being voluntary which resulted in some pupils leaving school without an NRA. However, this was seen as a price worth paying in order to integrate the NRA with the curriculum as a whole.

■ Pupils' views

Since a large number of pupils of different ages were interviewed there is great diversity in their views. There are, however, a few common themes to be noted.

First, there is a high level of awareness of NRA-related or pre-NRA-related activities among pupils of all ages in all four schools. All pupils said they had been involved in core activities such as filling in action planners, setting targets and writing personal statements.

Second, the aspect of the NRA process which pupils find most difficult and frequently 'embarrassing' is writing a personal statement. This appeared to be for two reasons: one, it went against peer-group culture in which making positive statements about oneself was seen as 'boasting'; two, it was perceived as difficult to know about yourself. Only two pupils (both from the same school but different in age) said they had found this a useful exercise. These comments underline the need to provide pupils with more support in this aspect of their NRA work.

Third, a sizeable minority said that they found the NRA process repetitive or 'boring'. This appeared to be either because they did not really understand the purpose of the

exercises they had been given to do, or in some cases because the exercises were indeed repetitive.

Fourth, in two schools the NRA process had made pupils focus more attention upon their reports.

Fifth, it was clear that the help pupils receive from teachers (and occasionally from materials) in their NRA-related work is seen to be of crucial importance. Those who felt they had had sufficient help singled this out for praise, and those who felt they had had insufficient help saw it as the reason for their lack of progress. Lack of continuity of support was mentioned as a problem by pupils in two schools.

Sixth, in three of the four schools pupils expressed interest and satisfaction in the NRA product which they found impressive.

■ Themes and issues

The NRA is a partially implemented innovation. Thus, in all four of the schools visited, pupils in S5 and S6 had not had the same opportunities as younger pupils to build up their NRA over several years. An evaluation at this early stage has great potential value in informing the further development of policy and practice, but should not be used to make judgements about the achievements of individual schools.

The themes and issues presented here arise from these case-studies of NRA work in four schools. We hope they will become the focus for discussion.We will return to these themes and issues in discussing what constitutes 'good practice' in the NRA in chapter 11.

ONE: The four case studies show that the process of working towards the NRA provides a framework for pupil development which can be adapted to fit the school's values and purposes. In all four schools the introduction of the NRA had made significant demands upon staff's and pupils' time. All four schools had adopted the strategy of integrating the NRA with other on-going work (either through restructuring aspects of the curriculum and time-table, or by linking the NRA with work on other initiatives). This strategy had the effect of minimising the increase to teacher work load. At its most ambitious it was bringing about fundamental change in teaching and learning practice. However, in all cases this meant that creative compromises had been necessary in terms of implementing recommended good practice in the NRA.

Issue: The greater the integration of the NRA with curriculum and other structures in the school, the greater its impact is likely to be on the teaching and learning process - but the more it is likely to depart from strict adherence to NRA policy guidelines.

TWO: In all four case study schools - and we would assert in the education system as a whole - there is a difference of aims and purposes between teachers of subjects and their guidance colleagues. The NRA provides a catalyst for greater integration of these distinct but, arguably, equally important aims and purposes if self-assessment, action planning and target setting are led by subject teachers and guidance staff working together.

Issue: Where NRA-related work is led by subject teachers rather than specialist guidance staff, the NRA process has the potential to have a greater impact upon student learning across the whole curriculum. However, there will inevitably be an element of voluntarism if the aim is to involve all staff, and this is likely to lead to uneven provision of support to pupils with their NRA.

THREE: It is clear from these case studies that the NRA challenges some existing assumptions of school culture, pupil culture and employer culture. This is the aspect of the NRA which is of greatest importance in its potential impact upon society. It may be that there is the need for more specific support to ensure that these challenges are understood and addressed by all concerned.

Issue: In schools the NRA is seen as a means of supporting the development of each individual, and by some teachers its value is seen to lie in equalising opportunities between pupils with different levels of advantage/disadvantage. Whereas, employers and to some extent FE/HE see the NRA as a tool for selection. This tension gives rise to a number of unresolved practical problems: eg how much help, and what kind of help, should pupils receive in producing their NRA? how long should the completed NRA be?

The case studies suggest that even where the links between schools and employers are relatively well developed, employers have very little understanding of the aims and purposes of the NRA; but they also suggest that the emphasis on the NRA process as the key to pupil development may have led some teachers to underestimate the importance of the NRA product as a selection tool. Both of these factors need to be taken into account when developing a strategy for promoting the NRA more effectively to employers.

FOUR: These differences in the perceived purposes of the NRA are closely linked to a further issue concerning the relative importance of the NRA process and the NRA product.

Issue: The NRA is both a process and a product. However, at the risk of over-simplifying we can say that those who know relatively little about the NRA (pupils, subject teachers, employers) are more likely to see it primarily as a product. Whereas, those who have been closely involved in the development of the NRA and support for its implementation (TVEI personnel, guidance teachers) are more likely to see it primarily as a process. The case-study interviews with teachers and pupils suggest that this gives rise to some confusion. At worst there is a danger that pupils and employers may have expectations of the NRA product which are subsequently not fulfilled.

FIVE: Another, closely-related issue concerns the production of the finished NRA.

Issue: In three of the four case -study schools the final versions of the NRA pages are produced by secretaries rather than by the pupils themselves. This ensures a high quality product and there is evidence that the pupils are proud of their professional appearance. Limited access to computers and other logistical problems also makes this an easier way to produce the final NRAs. The money for this secretarial support comes, in all cases, through TVEI (ie

the school has chosen to use TVEI funds in this way) and it appears that there may be difficulties in continuing to work in this way after TVEI comes to an end in 1996. Providing computer time and software for students to compile their own NRAs is one possible solution. In the one school where pupils already produce their own NRAs (either using a word processor or in their handwriting) there is some evidence to suggest that this gives them a strong sense of ownership of the product; however, there is also evidence that some pupils use this greater control to opt-out altogether from producing an NRA.

SIX: Another example of the NRA challenging existing assumptions of school culture, pupil culture and employer culture relates to pupils' need to develop skills of self-presentation.

Issue: Employers, FE/HE staff, school teachers and trainers are agreed that pupils need to develop self-esteem and learn to present themselves well in order to succeed in a competitive society. Whereas pupils see any display of self-esteem or any statements about their own personal strengths as 'boasting'. Because of peer group pressure, they are frequently 'embarrassed' by the process of writing a personal statement. In providing support for pupils' self-assessments and the writing of personal statements, much more attention needs to be paid to this clash of cultures and expectations, eg strategies might be developed to enable pupils' to understand this aspect of peer group pressure and begin to change it.

11 Good Practice and the NRA

An ambitious initiative

The National Record of Achievement is an ambitious initiative which involves individuals taking greater responsibility for their own learning. The concept is of a process of self-assessment, action planning and target setting which individuals begin in the primary school and continue to use throughout secondary schooling, training, higher education and employment. This process is recorded and regularly revised in the NRA folder, which also becomes the repository for awards such as certificates, diplomas and degrees.

The NRA is intended to provide much greater coherence to individual development. It is also intended to ensure that, as part of formal education and training, individuals develop the full range of skills which they will need in future employment.

The NRA involves a very large number of stake-holders. To be successfully implemented all these stake-holders must play their part in supporting the development of individuals and preparing them for transition to the next phase in their life history. Most of the stake-holders have two different roles to play eg FE and HE institutions should use the NRA for selection purposes when offering places to school leavers, but they should also support their own students in updating and developing their NRA to prepare for the next transition point.

The progress of an innovation

The NRA is a partially implemented innovation: firstly because sufficient time has not yet elapsed for any individual to go through the whole process of compiling an NRA at school and carrying it through successive transitions into and during adulthood; and secondly because the introduction of its predecessor, the RoA, was phased over several years under the funding arrangements of TVEI, with the result that schools in some EAs have had very much less experience than schools in some other EAs. The evaluation has found, not surprisingly, that those involved vary considerably in the level of their understanding of its fundamental purposes and the means of putting these into practice. It is, therefore, helpful to view NRA practice by any one stake-holder or institution as lying somewhere on a continuum between initial awareness of the NRA and full implementation of its philosophy as well as its procedures. At the risk of over-simplification, Figure 11.1 provides a map for understanding the level of use of the NRA by all stakeholders in terms of behavioural evidence and what we are calling 'stages of concern' and 'examples of typical expressions of concern'.

Our data show that implementing the NRA involves a large number of decisions as an institution moves along the innovation continuum. These decisions should ensure that the NRA is adopted in such a way that the best possible use is made of resources. To manage the change effectively, the NRA must either build upon on-going work or become part of a broadly based strategy linking it with other new developments.

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In relation to the continuum of innovation, the individuals who work together to implement the NRA in an institution move through levels of use from initial orientation and preparation, through mechanical and routine use, refinement and integration to creative implementation.

Figure 11.1: Levels of use of the NRA by different stakeholders, and typical stages of concern during its implementation

	Level of use	*Behavioural indices of level*	*Stages of concern*	*Examples of typical expressions of concern*
6	**Creative integration**	Seeking and finding more effective ways of using the NRA	Refocusing	It may be possible to make even better use of the NRA.
5	**Integration**	Making deliberate efforts to co-ordinate with and/or accommodate to others in the use of the NRA	Collaboration	I am concerned about relating what I am doing with the NRA to the needs of the other stakeholders.
4	**Refinement**	Making personalised refinements to increase the effectiveness of the NRA.	Consequence	What could I do to use the NRA more effectively?
3	**Routine**	Making few or no changes, having established a routine pattern of use of the NRA.	Management	I am going through all the recommended procedures for the NRA but I am not yet fully convinced of its value.
2	**Preparation**	Preparing to use the NRA.	Personal	What will I need to do to use the NRA?
1	**Orientation**	Seeking out information about the NRA.	Informational	I need to know more about the NRA.
0	**Non-use**	Inactive with respect to the NRA.	Awareness only	The NRA is not my concern.

■ Judging good practice in the NRA

Good practice in the NRA lies first and foremost in its continuing use in the educational life-history of an individual: from pre-NRA activities in the primary school; through the process of compiling the initial product in the secondary school; to the use of the NRA

in the transition to FE, HE and/or employment; and its continuous updating in all these environments.

In the remainder of this chapter we will, however, confine our remarks to issues relating to good practice in the NRA in schools. It is important that this is not taken to indicate that good practice in the NRA is either unimportant or unproblematic in other contexts such as FE, HE and employment. Good practice in these wider contexts is, however, beyond the remit of the evaluation. Apart from the limit on our time and resources, there is a simple reason for this: practice in the NRA has had time to become established in a sufficient number of schools to make it possible to identify examples of good practice, and this is not the case in other contexts. Use of the NRA in FE is just becoming established since pupils are now moving to FE from schools with NRAs. However, there has not been the same tradition of RoA work in FE as there has been in schools in Scotland, and we have not been able to collect data to enable us to comment on what constitutes good practice. Use of the NRA in HE and among trainers and employers is still very variable (we will discuss this further in chapter 12 on Issues Arising from the Findings).

In the course of carrying out the evaluation we have collected a considerable quantity of data on what constitutes good practice in the NRA in schools. Some of our data consist of check-lists of points developed by experienced users of the NRA or those with a responsibility for managing its implementation and training staff. These check-lists are useful and valuable, particularly at the early stages of implementation of the NRA, but they cannot provide an adequate description of good practice because they cannot take account of the context in which the NRA is being embedded. They also tend to focus upon the responsibilities of a limited number of stake-holders (eg teachers but not employers).

To enable judgements about good practice to be context-sensitive, as well as supportive of continuing development as the innovation becomes better established, we suggest a two-stage approach comprising:

- a check-list of preliminary criteria
- a set of questions to develop understanding of the NRA.

A check-list of preliminary criteria

This check-list has been developed from a number of existing check-lists (mainly confidential draft documents given to us by groups or individuals) and refined in the light of other data. It can be used to develop shared understanding and plan action strategies during the initial stages of implementing the NRA in schools. We have deliberately kept the check-list short.

Management

- ☐ There is a written policy on NRA.
- ☐ There is a named person responsible for NRA.
- ☐ Support in terms of time and money has been allocated to NRA by the school.
- ☐ Staff training has been provided.
- ☐ NRA processes are evaluated regularly.

Process

- ☐ The NRA is integrated into the school's formal procedures for individual pupil assessment and recording.
- ☐ The processes of self-assessment, reviewing achievements, recording achievements, setting targets and action planning are occurring throughout the curriculum.
- ☐ NRA-related activities begin as early as possible in the secondary school career for all pupils.
- ☐ Subject teachers, guidance staff and careers advisers are all involved in the NRA process.
- ☐ Pupils are encouraged to use the NRA to record their achievements in as many areas as possible, in-school and out-of-school eg including extra-curricular activities and EIL within their personal statements.
- ☐ The NRA action plan and the careers action plan are integrated.

Product

- ☐ The NRA is well presented and produced to a high standard.
- ☐ Pupils have a substantial input into the production of the summary documents in their NRA with support from teachers.

The NRA and leaving school

- ☐ Pupils are given clear instructions on different ways in which they might use their NRAs in the transition from school to FE/HE, employment or training.
- ☐ Pupils are encouraged to continue to use their NRA and the skills they have learned through it after leaving school.

■ A set of questions to develop understanding of the NRA

These questions, designed as a focus for staff development are grounded in our analysis of a very wide range of evaluation data, including the case-studies of schools, all of which were recommended to us as sites of good practice in the NRA. None of the four schools conformed in a simple way to the existing criteria for good practice in the NRA. However, the opportunity to discuss the problems of implementing the NRA with their staff has been centrally important in developing these questions.

The aim in any innovation is for as many users as possible to reach the level of 'creative integration'. At this level the NRA is fully integrated in the structures of the institution and makes a positive contribution to learning and teaching across the curriculum. NRA practice is in line with the national guidelines, but its use has been customised and refined to ensure that it provides the maximum added value to some of the school's other endeavours.

All the questions below can be answered at different levels. However, arriving quickly at simple answers will be of little value. In-depth discussion between all staff is an essential part of developing any innovation to the stage of 'creative integration' into the structures and practices of the school. In terms of staff development the discussion arising from the questions is likely to be much more important than the answers. If the questions generate other questions leading to further discussion so much the better.

Questions for all staff in the school

- Is it clear how the NRA relates to the school's aims for all its pupils?
- Is it clear how the NRA process is intended to contribute to developing pupils' skills as learners? To what extent is this aspiration currently being realised?
- Is it meaningful to speak of the NRA as a tool for life-long learning? Can this aspiration be achieved?

Questions for those with a responsibility for managing the NRA

- To what extent is the NRA process embedded in the structures of the school - eg in teaching across all subjects, in reporting to parents, in work experience?
- Is it possible to list the benefits to pupils and staff of the NRA? Do these constitute good value for the time and resources the school is investing in the NRA?
- Are the linkages between the NRA and other initiatives in the school clearly articulated? Is there 'added value' from these linkages?
- Is the NRA a focus for collaborative work between guidance staff and subject teachers?
- Where would you 'place' the school on the continuum of 'levels of use' and 'concern' for the NRA? How much variation is there between the 'placings' of colleagues involved in working on the NRA?
- Do staff involved in working with pupils on the NRA understand the importance of both the process and the product?
- Is there a procedure for evaluating and improving practice with the NRA in the school? Does this procedure involve all colleagues in some way?

Questions for staff involved in working with pupils on the NRA

- Do pupils understand how the NRA process is intended to develop their skills both as learners and as applicants at the next stage of transition?
- The NRA process required pupils to continually review targets and action plans. What strategies can help to make this process interesting and varied?
- Do pupils understand that their NRA 'product' is intended to be used as a tool for selectors and a compendium of information and documents which they themselves can draw upon, as well as a means of celebrating achievement?

Questions for staff involved in liaison with the careers service, FE/HE and employers?

- What added value can the careers service bring to pupils work on the NRA and vice versa? Are careers service personnel and staff in agreement about this inter-relationship?
- What features of the NRA are important for FE/HE in order to make it a useful tool in selection? Is the school encouraging pupils to incorporate these features?
- What links have been established between the NRA process and pupils' work experience? How are employers involved in this?
- What features of the NRA are important for employers in order to make it a useful tool in selection? Is the school encouraging pupils to incorporate these features?
- Can the process of compiling the NRA help pupils to take the initiative with forward-planning and thus facilitate their transition from school to work or FE/HE?

12 Issues Arising from the Findings

In school

Many schools have a high level of commitment to the NRA - both to the process of pupils' development of their record and to the final product. However, the lack of interest in and awareness of the NRA amongst users outside of schools may affect schools' commitment and undermine the value young people place in the document.

It is clear from the case-studies and from the survey of schools that commitment to the NRA process is high in schools, particularly amongst guidance staff. The majority of schools responding to the questionnaire agreed that the process was the most important part of the NRA. The majority agreed that the NRA process had increased pupil self-motivation, enhanced guidance and made pupils more pro-active in their own learning. Pupils and young people also said they had found most parts of the process helpful. The majority of students said they had found reviewing and recording their achievements, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and setting targets helpful in planning for the future, raising their self awareness or said they had found it helpful to review what they had done. The majority of S5 pupils surveyed said the NRA process had been helpful to them in planning for the future, had raised their awareness of skills they were using in their subjects and had given them a boost in self-confidence.

The status of the NRA document, however, is less clear. Most young people clearly valued it and seemed to think it looked impressive. Some school staff thought it was good that all pupils had a record of their achievement which did not focus only on academic achievements. However, while employers, training providers and HE institutions are not asking young people for the document in the process of selection, young people are receiving mixed messages about its value. The danger with this situation is twofold. Firstly, young people may begin to value the NRA document less if they see that few organisations beyond school are interested in it: this may discourage their interest in it and the process leading up to it while at school. Secondly, schools may begin to feel less committed to the NRA if it is not valued by bodies outside the school and be less inclined to work hard to implement it effectively. Although at present, the NRA process is evidently widely valued by schools, the process is clearly tied to the document and this discouragement might affect commitment to both the NRA process and the production of the document.

The NRA is very time-consuming to implement. If schools do not perceive that they have support from policy-makers, including adequate resources, there is a danger that their present commitment to the NRA may decline.

While the degree of commitment to the NRA appears to be high in schools, it requires a lot of time to implement it. This was cited as an obstacle to a full implementation of the NRA by schools, EAs and by FE and HE institutions. This is a big obstacle to the effectiveness of the NRA in schools and also to the introduction or development of the NRA in other sectors.

The free distribution of the NRA folders to schools for every young person in S4 represents a substantial, on-going financial investment of government. However, there is some indication that this provision may be taken for granted. Schools appear to be more concerned about the costs of implementing the NRA within the school. While the majority of schools surveyed had received staff development and technical support from their EAs, about half said they had not received any financial help or professional staff time to help them implement the NRA. Resourcing of the NRA is clearly a big issue. With the demise of TVEI, the resourcing requirements of the NRA will fall more and more onto individual schools.

This issue also has a bearing on the previous issue. If schools are not given the message that the NRA is being endorsed and valued by EAs, the government and external users they may be less inclined to commit the time and effort required to fully implement and develop it.

Some schools have made progress towards integrating the NRA into the curriculum and into the whole school's approach to assessment and recording. However, the NRA still remains largely a guidance-led initiative and subject teachers tend to be relatively uninformed and less committed to its purposes.

The impression gained from the case-studies and to some degree from the schools survey data is that the NRA process is largely guidance-led in schools, with subject teachers having a variable degree of involvement. Some of the staff in the case-study schools and a small proportion of the schools responding to the questionnaire said that subject teachers needed to be convinced of the value of NRA and to become more involved in and committed to the process. A great deal depends upon the way in which the NRA is being managed in schools. In general, schools have found ways of incorporating NRA practices into existing practices, often enhancing them in the process. In particular, many schools have used PSE as a useful vehicle for parts of the NRA process. In one of the case-study schools, the SCOTVEC work experience module had been used and, in fact, enhanced by the incorporation of the NRA.

At its most effective, the NRA process is integrated into the curriculum and into the whole school's approach to assessment and recording. It will require time, effort and resources for more schools to move in this direction.

A central purpose of the NRA is to improve individuals' skills in self-presentation. However, both staff and pupils agree that it is difficult for young people to write positively about themselves and focus on their achievements.

Some of the pupils and staff interviewed in the case-study schools and a small number of the respondents to the schools questionnaire mentioned that pupils have difficulty writing positively about themselves and their achievements. According to the teachers, pupils have difficulty finding anything to write and need a lot of help; and according to the pupils, it is embarrassing and might be seen as boastful to write positively about themselves. The NRA has highlighted this and to some degree is addressing the problem by requiring pupils to make the attempt. Other developments, such as the 5-14 programme are also placing emphasis on pupil self-assessment, and a recent support pack for teachers (*Action on Discipline in the Secondary School*, SOED 1993) has suggested the importance of giving praise as one means of raising pupils' self-esteem. However, there is still some way to go before it is seen as acceptable and normal, rather than as boastful or bigheaded, to focus on and recognise one's achievements and identify one's strengths.

This is also connected to the preceding issue, in that, the more that the NRA is integrated into the curriculum and into the school's assessment and recording procedures, the more familiar pupils will be with the skills of self-assessment and target setting and the more usual these will seem.

■ Post school

There is lack of clarity and considerable differences of opinion amongst different stakeholders about the purpose and value of the NRA post-school.

There are clear differences between the various stakeholders in their perceptions of the importance of the NRA post-school. On the one hand teachers are telling pupils, as they themselves have been told, that the NRA is a life-long record of achievements which will be continually updated after leaving school through a process of self-assessment and action planning. On the other hand, other bodies do not appear to see the NRA as a life-long document and are very varied in the extent to which they are encouraging or supporting its continued use. While a small number of employers make limited use of the NRA in selection, only a tiny minority have integrated the NRA with their own staff training programmes as a tool for self-assessment and action planning. Training providers are using the NRA in selection when it is presented by a young person but are not widely using it for trainee development. The use of the NRA is increasing in further education, both as a selection tool and a means of student self-development. When applying to higher education institutions, students are now asked to state on the application form (UCAS) whether they have an NRA and limited use is made of NRAs if students bring them to selection interviews. However, apart from this there has been

almost no take-up of the NRA in HE: it is not a requirement for selection and students are not encouraged to update it or use it as a continuing tool for self-assessment and personal development, although in a growing number of universities an alternative procedure has been developed (presumably as a result of staff's perception that the NRA is not suited to the needs of HE).

If the aim is that the NRA should be a life-long document which is continually updated, huge changes need to take place in existing practice of colleges and employers who - albeit in different ways - both have a responsibility for individuals post school.

Young people seem keen to continue updating their NRAs post-school but few institutions or organisations are encouraging them to do this.

The majority of schools surveyed said they were encouraging their pupils to continue updating their NRAs post-school, and the majority of young people in our sample generally seemed positive about doing so in the future. However, as already indicated, very few institutions or organisations post-school seem to be encouraging young people to update their NRAs or providing facilities or support to help them to do so. It seems clear that it will be difficult for young people to sustain their initial enthusiasm for updating the NRA if their employers or colleges are not interested in it and if no support or facilities are being provided for them to do so.

Is it feasible and/or appropriate for the NRA to continue to be promoted as a record of life-long achievement to be used across all kinds of organisations as both a tool for selection and a means of self-assessment and personal learning?

One possible response to this perceived failure of the NRA to be adopted wholeheartedly by employers and FE/HE is to ask whether the aims are too all-embracing and should be modified. Is it realistic to think that institutions which have such very different purposes (education / commercial gain) and therefore such different responsibilities in relation to the individuals who work within them (to support their development *per se* / to support their development to improve the efficiency of the company) can all find the NRA equally appropriate to their needs?

It is clear that employers are happy with existing selection methods and are largely unaware of how the NRA might help them to meet national training standards by encouraging employees to take ownership of their own development. It has already proved difficult to mobilise interest amongst employers. There are also some problematic issues related to the purpose and use of the NRA. The emphasis within school upon pupils recording self-assessment, including self-criticism, raises questions about the extent to which the NRA is a public document or a private and personal record. If the NRA becomes more widely used in FE/HE and employment there must be clarity about what it means for an individual to *own* his or her NRA. It may even be necessary for the status

of the document to change as an individual moves from education to employment and the NRA is incorporated in company staff appraisal schemes.

While it is clear that higher education institutions perceive the need for some form of self-assessment and action planning for their students, it is equally clear that they perceive the NRA to be suited to use in schools but not to use in HE. The packs being developed in HE provide more detailed guidance for students than the NRA folder, and it would appear that this is because they are intended to be self-administered with only minimal tutor support. Is it feasible - or necessary - for HE to integrate these in-house schemes with the NRA? At present they are effective self-development tools but are not intended to become records of achievement for the use of future employers. Would HE be able to provide the resources to validate individuals' NRAs so that they could become a reliable record of students' achievements over and above their degree or diploma?

Yet, in the case of both employers and HE, if they do not show any commitment to supporting individuals in updating their NRA, there are implications for the perceived value of the NRA to pupils and teachers in schools. At the very least it needs to be made clear how the NRA relates to processes such as self-assessment and appraisal in HE and employment.

Given the current aims for the NRA to be used throughout an individual's life in school, FE/HE and employment, what are the implications for promoting the NRA effectively?

The other possible response to this perceived failure of the NRA to be adopted wholeheartedly by employers and FE/HE is to promote it much more effectively. Many of our respondents spoke forcefully of the need to 'market' the NRA to employers, but since there is no clarity about the aims of the NRA post-school there is no clarity about the aims of this promotion. The NRA could be promoted in many ways: as a selection tool, as a tool for use at a young person's discretion (owned by the young person), as a staff training tool. All these imply different types of promotion and different strategies. At the moment responsibility for promotion of the NRA to employers is also not clear: government, schools, FE and the careers services all appear to be doing a small amount informally but none of these institutions see promoting the NRA as their responsibility.

Currently few mechanisms seem to be in place for effective liaison between the different sectors using the NRA. It might be feasible to integrate the NRA formally with existing services and initiatives, as it is already being integrated informally by some schools, employers and other interested parties.

We know from our survey that very few schools apart from special schools have liaised with other users of the NRA in order to promote the NRA to them or to ask for feedback on it. The problem seems to be mainly one of the absence of mechanisms for liaison. Employers, FE/HE staff and training providers, as well as the teachers themselves, are

all working under pressure and by definition have little to do with those groups on the other side of 'transition points'. It might be relatively easy to set up links between the NRA process in schools and some other existing initiatives such as education-business partnerships and Investors in People. The latter would be particularly valuable as it is already well-established in the business world and, like the NRA, is concerned with the development of individuals.

The only group which has established liaison mechanisms with schools, FE/HE and employers is careers officers. Sixty per cent of schools claim to have liaised with their careers service over the NRA. This is to be expected since careers services are specifically set up to assist individuals at transition points in their lives. However, even here there is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities in relation to the NRA. Careers officers draw up an action plan for pupils between S4 and S6, but they may have little or no involvement with the action planning process in the NRA. This is because careers officers are responsible for drawing up a careers action plan with or on behalf of the pupils, while the pupil him or herself is responsible for drawing up an NRA action plan with tutorial support. Bringing these two processes together is of obvious advantage for pupils, but it requires a high level of coordination between schools and the careers service and is likely to have resource implications.

13 Recommendations

In this final chapter we present suggestions and recommendations arising from the evaluation which have implications for the continuing implementation of the NRA. We hope this will form a useful discussion document for national policy-makers as well as for those leading the development of the NRA within schools, FE and HE institutions and the new local authorities.

- Government policy on, and support for, the NRA needs to be re-stated in order to give it a high profile nationally.
- The purpose of the NRA should be clarified, so that individuals, educational institutions and employers all share a common understanding of the way the process of compiling the NRA relates to the NRA folder, and the relative importance of each.

  In particular, a decision needs to be made as to whether it is feasible and/or appropriate for the NRA to continue to be promoted as a record of life-long achievement to be used across all kinds of organisations as both a tool for selection and a means of self-assessment and personal learning.

  If the answer is yes, the NRA needs to be promoted more effectively, particularly to employers and higher education. Appropriate strategies would need to be developed, costed and resourced.
- One body should be given overall responsibility for promoting the NRA and it should be clear whether this body has any powers to enforce
- There is a need to develop mechanisms to give the NRA a more central role. For example, the NRA could be incorporated as a part-requirement in other initiatives such as Skillseekers, Education-Business partnerships and Investors in People.
- It needs to be made clear *who is responsible for what* in developing and using the NRA; and effective liaison mechanisms need to be developed between all involved. Schools, education authorities, further education, higher education, careers services, trainers, employers, individuals and even parents all have a role to play, but at present the responsibilities of each of these stakeholders and their inter-relationships are unclear.
- It should be recognised that there needs to be diversity in NRA practice if it is to span a wide range of educational and commercial organisations. Schools, FE/HE, trainers and employers need to be able to customise the NRA *process* to suit the needs of individuals *at that time, in that context*. An individual's NRA should be seen as a dynamic document which is both added to and amended over the years. Some consistency of the NRA *product* is important, however, to ensure that it is of use when the individual makes a transition to a different organisation.

- The role of careers services in supporting the NRA process and promoting the product needs to be clarified. The current involvement of the careers services with the NRA in schools should be developed further: there would be obvious benefits in integrating the careers action plan with the action planning process in the NRA but this would necessitate increased resources for careers services.

- Young people should be encouraged to see their NRA as a tool-kit and aide-memoire for their own use, as well as a document that might be used in its entirety. They need to be shown how to select relevant information from their NRA for use in both written applications and interviews.

- Serious consideration should be given to how best schools - and indeed other organisations - can resource the process of compiling and producing the NRA. After the demise of TVEI there may be a need for some additional funding. On the other hand, if the NRA is seen to be sufficiently worthwhile, schools may be able to resource it from existing funds. Internal funding, however, involves setting priorities, and resources devoted to one initiative can only be used for another if the two are integrated.

- In schools, the NRA should be integrated with the curriculum; and subject teachers as well as guidance staff should be involved in supporting the NRA process. This implies the need for in-service training in the NRA for all teachers.

- All concerned need to recognise that young people find it embarrassing, and therefore difficult, to write positively about themselves. The NRA is designed to help them develop skills in self-assessment and self-presentation, and to improve their self-image. However, they will continue to need considerable support in this area at least until the NRA process is sufficiently embedded in teaching and learning practice to bring about something of a culture change.

- Ideally, the NRA should become a standard part of practice in assessment and recording in educational institutions.

- Ideally, the NRA should become a standard part of practice in appraisal schemes in employment.

- Institutions need to ensure that the NRA is adopted in such a way that the best possible use is made of resources. To manage the change effectively, the NRA must either build upon on-going work or become part of a broadly based strategy linking it with other new developments.

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